

To Be Or Not To Be (a pet) by AnimeFaeMoon

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Summary:

I recently finished watching the movie and have read all the books and felt I needed a little more exploration on Riki's and Iason's relationship. This will start off shortly after Riki returns to Iason, and will go on from there. Iason and Riki do not die in this Rated M for language and sexual scenes.

Relationships: Iason Mink/Riki

Series: Blondies Have More Fun [1]

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Chapter 1

Author's Note:

I spotted Ai No Kusabi on Youtube one day and fell in love with it I promptly ordered the remake (sadly only one half of the story) and the novels. I found Iason and Riki's relationship both heart wrenching and enthralling, and so started to wonder about all the missing pieces that were not explored in Rieko Yoshihara's novels. I own nothing.

For my first story, I am starting it shortly after Riki returns to Iason to save Guy. I am making Iason a little softer in this story than he was in the novels, so I hope you will forgive me.

And Thanks to my new friend Alex, you can also read the Spanish version of this story at

<https://www.amor-y-aioic.com/viewstory.php?sid=191034>
or <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/12545967/1/SER-O-NO-SER-UNA-MASCOTA>

Iason stepped into his condo, handed over his cloak to Cal and then moved to the balcony where his pet was perched on the railing smoking. Unlike other pets, Riki rarely greeted him at the door, but Iason didn't mind this. He loved his mongrel for his challenges as well as his obedience.

As usual Riki was lost in thought as he looked out over the city. Looking towards the slums of Ceres, towards Guy. It had been the only way to get Riki to return to him, the only thing that Riki could not refuse; his old pairing partner. It angered him that Riki still cared about Guy, but he tried not to let it bother him. Riki was here now, was his again and he didn't care if Riki did it for Guy or even if he thought of Guy while they were having sex, it didn't matter as long as Riki remained with him.

Iason's hand curled into a fist, because it did matter damn it. He wanted Riki to forget about Guy. He wanted Riki to love him!

When he spoke, there was no trace of his anger or frustration. "Did you go out today?"

“Yeah, I took a shuttle to Magena and played the slots.”

Iason knew sarcasm when he heard it, especially since Riki could not leave Eos because of his pet ring. Unfortunately he was not well liked or tolerated so rather than suffer the stares or risk causing trouble by beating some tormenting pet to death he just stayed inside all day. Even Iason could admit that would bother him.

“Riki, I know you are frustrated.”

“You don’t know anything.” Riki tossed his cigarette over the edge and hopped down to stare up at Iason. “You have no fucking clue.”

“I wish to speak with you about something important.” When Riki shoved his hands in his pockets and leaned against the railing, rather than reply, he continued. “We have guests coming this week and I need you here with me.”

“I am here. I’m always fucking here. Where else would I be?”

“What I mean is I need you to behave properly, Riki. Another Blondie and his pet will be staying with us for a few days and I want you here to attend me as my pet.” Not hiding in his room or on the balcony smoking.

Riki grimaced and gritted his teeth. “To show me off?” He hated it when Iason paraded him around like a pet pony. He thought they were beyond all that now.

“In a manner of speaking. The request for the visit has come from Jupiter, Diman is an important Blondie.”

“As important as you?” Riki smirked and lifted his chin defiantly, but it was a rhetorical question, there was no one more important than Iason Mink, not in Eos or anywhere else.

Iason lifted a gloved hand and caressed Riki’s chin, pleased when the mongrel did not flinch away as he once used to. Riki seemed to have accepted his fate, to some extent, since it was his choice to return. He no

longer shied away from Iason's touch, but he never reciprocated it either. "What do you think?"

Riki shrugged.

"At any rate, Diman has requested you be here for it. He wants to meet you" Iason caught Riki's chin between firm fingers. "I expect you to behave, Riki. This is very important."

Riki glared up at Iason. "Why is it important?"

"Because I say it is. I mean it, Riki. Punishment will be severe if you do not do exactly as I tell you while they are here."

"You'd fucking love that, wouldn't you? You love punishing me."

"I don't no, but I will." Iason's free hand settled at Riki's hip and pulled him closer. "It is just for three days, Riki."

"If I behave will you let me go?"

"You are here of your own accord, Riki. You chose to return, remember, and you know what the consequences of your actions would be."

Riki's eyes lowered, dejectedly. Yeah, he had chosen this, to save Guy and his crew from Bison, but not only that. He'd realized that he was ruined now, he couldn't just go back to the slums, he couldn't be the leader of Bison. All he was capable of was being Iason Mink's pet. It made him sick.

"Fine. What do I have to do?"

Iason smiled. "Just behave yourself, do as you're told and act as a loving pet. You can do that much can't you?"

"I'm not gonna fawn over you and kiss your feet, Iason."

"I know that." Iason realized he would be disappointed if Riki did submit that much. "However, you can be nice when you put your mind to it, even obedient."

Riki rolled his eyes. "Whatever." He flinched as Iason's hand moved from his hip to his groin in the skip of a heartbeat and squeezed. GOD! He hated how quickly he responded to the elite's touch, hated that he was conditioned to respond.

"Good boy" Iason licked his way up Riki's neck, and then gently bit the mongrel's ear, reveling in the gentle hiss of desire that Riki released. "I missed you."

Riki didn't see how that was possible after almost four straight hours of sex the previous evening, Riki was still sore from it. "You had me enough last night..." he protested and started to pull back but found himself suddenly trapped between the concrete barrier of the balcony and an impossibly strong Blondie. "Iason, come on..."

"It's not enough," Iason murmured as his hands reached inside Riki's shirt to play with the brunette's nipples, knowing this was an especially sensitive spot for him. "It's never enough."

"Fucking pervert..." Riki's breath hitched and his eyes closed of their own volition as Iason did what he did best, turned his body into an over sensitized, sex craving toy. "C...come on...ahh...Iason...not...not out...hhuuhhh...here."

"No one can see us, Riki."

"Not...Not out here..." Riki put his hands on Iason's chest and shoved hard, surprising the blonde enough that Iason actually moved back an inch. "Please. Not here."

Everywhere he went in this apartment was a reminder of sex and the fact that he was Iason's pet. He needed the balcony for his own space, his sanctuary away from all of that.

Because he said please, and Iason could hear the genuine plea in Riki's voice, Instead of getting angry, he nodded and took Riki's wrist. "The bedroom then."

Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki is trying to be the model pet for Iason's guests, but will it cause him more harm than good?

“So, this is the famous slum mongrel turned elite pet?” Diman said as he settled upon the wide white sofa opposite the matching chair where Iason sat. “How old is he?”

“Twenty,” Iason said as he accepted his drink from Cal and looked to where Riki perched on the arm of his chair. “Do you want a drink, Riki?”

Riki shook his head. He just wanted this over with.

Their guest Blondie was not quite as tall as Iason, perhaps only an inch or two shorter, but it was enough to notice a difference. Unlike the tasteless tone of derision that Raoul used, or the bored, self important sound of other Blondies he had met, Diman seemed genuinely pleasant and more curious in his questions than condemning.

“So old?” Diman smiled at Riki. “Well, you don’t look a day over seventeen, dear, so mongrel’s must have good genes.”

Riki had to struggle not to roll his eyes.

“My sweet Aleia is almost fifteen now, aren’t you pet?”

“Yes, Master.”

The girl barely looked twelve, aside from the fact she had large breasts. Her hair was an interesting shade of yellow, not blond or gold, but yellow and her eyes were closer to violet than blue, slightly slanted and throwing off the usual perfected look of most pets. Her outfit was almost modest compared to other pets as well, with a striped tank top, light blouse over it and a black mini-skirt. Riki had agreed to wear the usual half shirt and

black pants that Iason preferred him in when they went out, so he felt less exposed than what he had been forced to wear at the pet parties.

“Do you find her attractive, Riki?” Diman asked mildly, noticing the dark eyes of the mongrel roaming over his pet.

Immediately Riki looked away and felt the hand on his waist tighten slightly. No, he would never again make that mistake.

“Answer Diman, Riki.”

How could he answer? If he said yes Iason would be pissed. If he said no he’d offend their guest and both Blondie’s would be pissed. Either way spelled punishment for him.

Luckily Cal arrived and announced dinner was ready and Riki’s body almost melted with relief.

“Excellent, please show our guests to the table, Cal. Riki and I will be in shortly.”

Shit. Riki started to rise but Iason’s arm snaked around him and pulled him onto his lap.

“Answer the question, Riki.”

Riki immediately started to struggled, but then those livid blue eyes narrowed on him with such intense jealousy he breath left his body. Fuck!

“I won’t ask again.”

“She’s a kid!” Riki croaked. “No. I don’t. She’s just a kid.” He held his breath until he saw Iason’s expression soften. When Iason crushed their mouths together, Riki could feel the anger behind it and shivered.

“That’s good, Riki.” Iason rose, pulling a shaky Riki with him. “Let’s go eat, pet.”

They entered the dining area and saw Diman settled at the table, with Aleia standing behind him. Riki settled in his usual chair to the right of Iason and

saw Diman and his pet's eyes widen in surprise.

"I do not use a separate pet table for meals," Iason explained. "Riki and I eat together, and Aleia may do the same if you so wish."

Diman smiled and nodded at his pet, who quickly sat next to her master and lowered her eyes, obviously never having been in such a position before. "You are a constant surprise, Iason. I have heard that you do not use conventional methods with your pet, but I had not realized how unconventional they were."

Iason nodded at Cal as the furniture placed a plate of delicious smelling food before Diman, and then an identical plate before Iason. "You disapprove?"

"On the contrary, I find it quite interesting, and your pet certainly seems far better mannered than I had expected him to be."

Riki's fingers tightened on his fork as Cal set his plate before him, and swallowed the retort that rose to his lips. Fucking behave, Iason had said. Be the model pet, God he hated it! He noticed Aleia trying to flirt with him across the table, sending him looks beneath her long lashes and so he kept his eyes on his plate. He didn't need that complication.

Cal served Aleia her food, and then poured wine for everyone but Riki, who glass already held water. His taste for wine had depleted after the first time it had been used to feed him aphrodisiacs.

Riki tuned out the conversation as he ate, and tried to enjoy the taste of his food. Cal was an excellent cook, even better than Daryl had been, but anytime Riki ate such sumptuous meal he always felt guilty about the people starving in the slums. Although he refused to let himself get attached to Cal as he had Daryl, who he'd both despised and sympathized with.

Diman and Iason spoke politics and business through most of dinner, and in no time Cal was removing their plates and delivering desert. He placed a traditional desert of Eos, consisting of a bowl of tart berries topped with a sweet and sour cream in front of Iason and Diman, and a large slice of dark cake in front of Riki.

“Oh? What is that?” Aleia asked curious when Cal came around to her and offered her the berry desert.

Cal looked at Iason for permission before replying. “Chocolate cake, Master Riki’s favourite. He does not care for the other desert.”

“I would like to try it.” She looked at Diman imploringly. “May I try some?”

He smiled indulgently as he dug into his berries. “If you wish.”

Cal nodded. “I shall bring you a piece.”

Riki watched the furniture leave the room and scowled. Cal knew about cake because of Guardian, he had learned that the young boy had been there when Riki was still interned. They didn’t get much in the way of sweets or good food there, but now and then a patron would bring them cakes or cookies for a special occasion. The first day Cal had made a chocolate cake for him, Riki almost cried from the memory and flavour of it.

“Oh my!” Aleia cried after she took her first forkful of cake. “This is wonderful. You should try this, Master.” She held her fork out to Diman who declined.

“It would not be to my taste, dear. You enjoy it.”

Iason glanced at Riki, watching his pet savor each bite of the cake and had a strange wish to be Riki’s fork. Oh to feel those lovely lips wrapped around him as he fucked that sweet mouth. That had been one thing they hadn’t done yet, it was not exactly taboo for a Blondie to have fellatio performed on him, but it was frowned upon. Stimulation was almost always visual for the Elites, they watched pets have sex or masturbate and that was how they received their pleasure.

Of course, he had already broken so many rules when it came to Riki, what was one more? He wondered if he would have to force Riki to comply, since he had never requested it before. Hmmm, it would be interesting to say the least. Perhaps tonight he would try it. Usually he was satisfied to be

inside Riki, but now he was fully aroused just watching his pet lick the chocolate off a fork!

Riki, unaware of Iason's appraisal and perverted thoughts finished off his cake, then waited until everyone else was done and picked up his plate and reached for Iason's empty bowl. He often helped Cal clear, explaining to Iason it made him feel useful and not such a slacker, but he'd forgotten their company.

"It's fine," Iason assured, seeing Riki's hesitation.

Riki walked around the table and collected the other dishes then stepped out of the room, catching Diman's obvious question just as he was leaving.

"Is that not the furniture's job?"

"Riki likes to help, it is his way."

Riki stepped into the kitchen and set the dishes in the washing tube as Cal nodded to him.

"Thank you, Master Riki." Cal gave up asking the mongrel not to do such things, Riki rarely listened to anyone except Iason, and even with his master the pet could be stubborn. Perhaps that was why Cal liked him so much. "How was your cake?"

Riki opened the drink cooler and pulled out a beer that Iason allowed to be stocked specially for him, then hopped up on the counter as he opened it. "Good, thanks, wouldn't mind another piece actually."

Cal promptly sliced the cake on the counter and handed Riki the plate with a clean fork.

Riki took a long swallow of beer then set it on the counter beside him as he accepted the cake. "What was that thing we had for dinner? We haven't had that before."

"Gultch. It is a delicacy in Midas."

“Sounds nasty.” Riki shivered as he slid a piece of cake into his mouth. “Do I want to know what was in it?”

Cal smiled briefly as he prepared the wash cycle. “Probably not. Did you enjoy it?”

“I did till I heard what it was called.”

Cal almost smiled as he went about his kitchen duties as Riki sat on the counter, his legs swinging as he ate his cake and drank his beer. “You should go back inside, Master Riki.”

“I know, I know.” Riki set the rest of his cake on the counter and hopped down. He took another long swallow of beer. He’d given up on trying to get the boy to just call him Riki. “Give me something to bring back.”

“Master Riki...”

“Come on, so I have an excuse for being in here so long.” When Cal still hesitated Riki continued. “You won’t get in trouble, I promise.”

Cal tried not to sigh and gave Riki the bottle of wine he had opened for dinner. “Very well. Here.”

Iason glanced up as Riki reappeared and watched his pet walk around the table, filling their glasses, once again leaving his own empty. He rose and took his glass of wine. “Would you care for a game of Pool, Dimon?”

The Blondie brightened. “I would indeed.”

“Excellent.”

Hoping he would be excused since Iason would be occupied with the game, Riki started to veer off the other way toward the balcony but Iason caught his wrist and yanked him back.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Iason purred dangerously in his ear as they started down the hall and stepped into the game room.

“You don’t usually want me in here,” Riki countered just as quietly and tried to discretely pull away from Iason’s grip, as their guests moved further into the room.

“I want you everywhere, Riki,” Iason whispered and delighted in his pet’s discomfort. “And I have never said you couldn’t come in here.”

Riki shrugged and glanced at where Diman was looking over the pool table and studying the cue sticks on the wall. “You usually send me to my room when you’re in here with Raoul.”

“Ah. Well, that is because you and Raoul....clash.”

Riki smirked and was startled when Iason bent down and licked a bit of chocolate from the corner of his mouth.

“No more sweets tonight.”

Riki wiped at his mouth self-consciously, hating when Iason treated him like a child, and completely missing the shocked look of their guests.

Iason, however, had deliberately been watching Diman for a reaction. The Blondie was polite and friendly, even to his pet, which immediately made Iason suspicious. Why were they really here, he wondered? Surely it wasn’t just because he was curious about Riki or because Diman wished Iason to assist him with a deal in Midas that Jupiter had approved. No, there had to be more to it than that.

Iason released Riki and gave him a little pat on the backside. “Go sit down and watch.”

Riki glared at him then decided since he was going to be forced to continue this farce a while longer, he may as well be comfortable. He dropped down in the corner of the sectional so he could stretch his legs out across the cushions, pulled one leg up to lean against the inside of the sofa and rested his wrist across the top of his knee.

“My Master is very good at this game.” Aleia said as she curled on the cushion next to Riki. “Do you know the rules?”

“Yeah.” He’d played the game several times on one of his excursions to Midas when he was a member of Bison, as they didn’t have anything so entertaining in Ceres.

Iason and Diman set up the game and began to shoot as they made small talk.

“Your cake was very good,” Aleia told Riki with a wide smile.

“It wasn’t mine, it was Cal’s.”

Why was she even talking to him, he wondered? Why couldn’t she be like the rest of the pets around here and avoid or despise him? He tried to concentrate on the game, he’d never seen Iason play before, and was impressed at how good he was.

“We can go to the salon tomorrow, I hear it is wonderful. We’ve been off planet for so long, and I know they’ve made some changes.”

The five, Iason, go for the five, Riki encouraged silently as he watched the game between the Blondies progress.

“Maybe we can do some shopping too? I need some new clothes. What about you, Riki? What do you need to buy?”

He glanced at her. “What?”

“When we go shopping. What will you buy?”

“I don’t shop.” Which was true, Cal bought his cigarettes for him and Iason purchased his clothes. Besides, he hated going out and being stared at and talked about.

“Oh.” Aleia frowned, taken aback. “Well, what shall we do after the salon? My Master has said I can have the whole morning to...”

“The six will need a bank shot, shoot the nine,” Riki said and then winced as Iason and Diman glanced at him. Shit. Shit! “S...sorry.”

Iason regarded him quietly for a moment, then turned back to examine the table. He adjusted his shot to aim for the nine and it slid smoothly into the side pocket. "Thank you, Riki."

Riki released the breath he had been holding and bit hard on his lip to keep from speaking out again.

"Riki!"

He turned to Aleia and snapped. "What?"

"Where shall we go after the salon?"

"Go wherever you want, I won't be there."

"But...I need someone to show me around. I can't go by myself."

"You'll have to, I don't go out."

"But...why?"

"Aleia."

She glanced up at her Master's sharp voice and flushed.

"You are making a nuisance of yourself."

She pouted, moved further over on the sofa, away from Riki and curled into herself to sulk.

Riki was relieved for the distance she put between them and again tried to watch the game.

Iason won easily and Diman smiled at him.

"Well played, Iason. I see the rumour of your skill to be true." He set his cue on the table and extended his hand, Aleia immediately rose to take it. "Unfortunately we had a very long trip here so must retire. Perhaps another game tomorrow?"

Iason nodded graciously. "Certainly, I'll show you to your rooms." When Riki also rose, Iason waved him back. "Wait here, Riki."

What now, Riki wondered? Was he in trouble for speaking up about Iason's shot? Deciding he could only wait and see, he lay his head back and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, Iason was staring down at him. Slowly he rose. "So, what now?"

"I was unaware you could play this game, Riki. Why didn't you tell me?"

Riki shrugged. "You never asked."

"Would you like to play then?"

Riki's eyes widened. Was he serious. "I'm no match for you, Iason."

"Not up to a challenge then? A shame."

Riki bristled. "I didn't say that."

Iason nodded, picked up Diman's discarded cue and tossed it at his pet, pleased when Riki easily caught it. "You may break if you wish."

Riki shrugged and moved to the table. He broke the collection of colored balls and sank the eleven and twelve on the first shots. He moved to the side, bent over his cue and aimed at the fourteen, then stiffened as he felt Iason's hands slide around his waist.

"Are we gonna play or are we gonna fuck around?"

"Can't we do both?" Iason asked mildly as he slid one hand up over Riki's chest and rubbed at an already hardening nipple.

"N...no." Riki tried to resist, hated the fact that his body reacted automatically to Iason's touch.

"Try. Go ahead take your shot."

Knowing it was an order, Riki bit his lip as Iason's thumb continued to rub against his sensitive nipple and closed his eyes for a moment. He opened them and tried to focus, but when he leaned over the cue again his ass came in direct contact with Iason's groin. Damn it.

"Do it, Riki."

Riki wet his lips, gripped the pool cue harder and stared at the fourteen until his eyes watered. He pulled the cue back between his two fingers splayed against the fabric of the table, and slid it forward. The cue ball hit the fourteen exactly as it should have, and the ball rolled towards the pocket, but stopped just at the very edge of it.

"You missed."

"Fuck off." Riki hissed as Iason's other hand moved down over his groin and squeezed. "I...thought you...wanted to play?" he ground out, bitterly.

"I am playing." Iason pushed Riki down on the table, so he was completely bent over from the waist, and then unlatched his pet's trousers. "You did very well tonight, Riki."

"Then stop this."

"No." Iason pulled Riki's pants down. "Step out."

Riki had no choice but to obey, dismayed when he felt his clothing being pulled away from his feet.

"It will be quick," Iason advised as he fisted Riki's member in his hand, now free from its glove. "I've been wanting to do this all night."

Riki hoped it would be quick, but he also knew it would be painful, not that Iason was ever concerned about his comfort.

Sometimes he used lubricant, more often than not he'd play with him a good long time before he would penetrate him, but without either he wasn't nearly ready for this.

“Wait...” He began when he felt Iason’s engorged organ pressed against his entrance. He hated himself for begging. “Not dry...it hurts when...”

He was startled when Iason released him and spun him around.

“Very well, lubricate me.”

Riki’s eyes widened, he looked down at Iason’s massive member then back up at the Blondie. Iason had never asked him to do that before, he’d heard from other pets that Blondies never allowed such a thing. Of course those same pets claimed that masters didn’t sleep with their pets either.

“Before I change my mind, Riki.”

Knowing he was going to get fucked either way, and preferring the less painful method he slowly dropped to his knees. He gritted his teeth angrily before taking hold of Iason and sliding his lips around him. Pretend it’s Guy, he thought to himself. Just pretend it’s Guy.

Iason’s fingers gripping the table behind him was the only sign that Riki’s administrations were affecting him. He watched as the dark head moved back and forth over him and wondered why he had waited so long to try this. It felt incredible! Riki’s mouth was moist and hot and his tongue was extremely talented.

Riki’s eyes were closed and Iason wondered who the mongrel was thinking about, his pairing partner from the slums? He had originally told Riki that he didn’t care who he thought of as long as he was aware that he was still a pet, but now, as he stared down into his pet’s face, watched as the mongrel obediently sucked and licked him and a rage suddenly filled him at the idea that Riki was on his knees and thinking of Guy.

He wrenched back, hauled Riki up and slammed him over the table again.

“Ah! Fuck, Iason what...” Riki’s head flew backwards as Iason rammed into him. “Gaaahhhh!” Tears sprang to his eyes and his hands curled into fists. Fuck! Fuck it still hurt! “P...please...don’t....slow down...”

Iason was too far gone to listen, he thrust repeatedly into Riki while yanking hard on his pet's hair. Riki was helpless to do anything but succumb, into the pain, the pleasure and then the pain again.

"You are mine, Riki!"

Riki sobbed as the harsh fabric of the table scratched at his arms and stomach. Please let it be quick, he pleaded silently. Please let it be over soon.

Surprisingly, his prayers were answered, for Iason came moments later. Usually the Blondie was insatiable and could last an hour or more, but thankfully tonight he was quicker.

Riki cringed as Iason peppered the back of his neck with kisses.

"Thank you, pet."

Don't fucking thank me, Riki wanted to scream at him. What choice did I have in any of it?

Iason took Riki's hand and turned him around, caught the mongrel's chin and forced Riki's gaze upwards. Tears still glistened in those dark opal eyes, and also anger. "Kiss me."

Riki lifted his lips up and touched them to Iason's obediently, but his eyes never closed, if anything they simply narrowed in fury.

"Did I hurt you?"

"What do you think?"

Iason caressed Riki's cheek then caught his wrist again. "Come, I'll make it up to you."

"I don't want..." Riki began then fell silent. What was the point? Iason would do whatever the hell he wanted.

Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason tries to make up with Riki.

Iason stepped out of the bathroom in a long black tunic, white slacks and white drape coat. His gaze rested on the figure sprawled in the sheets on his bed and he sighed. Had he gone overboard yesterday? He had hurt Riki, because he knew that Riki had been deliberately thinking of Guy. Still, he felt a pang of regret at his actions now.

He sat down and gently pulled away the dark hair covering his pet's beautiful face. "Riki?"

Riki moaned but didn't wake.

Iason ran his fingers across his mate's lightly parted lips, then brushed his knuckles across Riki's cheek. "Riki?"

Slowly, reluctantly long, dark eyelashes fluttered and lifted, revealing drowsy near-black eyes. As they focused on Iason, the Blondie watched a mixture of fear and anger flood them.

"How are you feeling?"

Riki glared at him. "How the fuck do you think?"

"I'm sorry, Riki."

Riki blinked, startled. What? Iason never apologized! He lifted up on his elbows and scowled. "You...you are?"

"Yes," Iason smirked. "Why do you sound so surprised?"

"You....because you've never said it." Not once, not ever, in all the time Riki had been with Iason, through all the pain, pleasure and torment had the Blondie ever apologized and for some reason this frightened him and his

eyes narrowed even more.

"What...what are you going to do to me?" Was the apology simply a prelude to something worse? Had he finally gotten fed up with him and was going to trade him or sell him off to a brothel?

"Well, I confess I can think of doing many things to you right now, pet." Iason placed his gloved hand against Riki's chest, right over his heart and could feel intense, rapid pace against his fingertips. His pet was scared again. "However, it will have to wait as I have to go out this morning with Diman."

When Riki simply stared at him, looking even more uneasy Iason bit back a frustrated sigh. Was his pet really so unsure of his intentions still? Apparently so, so he would elaborate to put Riki at ease. "I was harsh last night and I did not mean to be." He could see the confusion and doubt in Riki's eyes. "Your behavior was exceptional and I should have rewarded you instead of..."

"Punishing me?" Riki said bitterly and finally lowered his eyes, even as his hands curled into fists. His body was still incredibly sore.

"Yes." Iason caught Riki's chin, it annoyed him when the mongrel didn't look him in the eye. Most pets were told not to look at their master's eyes directly, however Riki's eyes were the window to his soul and he needed to see them to know what his pet was feeling. "However, please believe that punishment was not my intent. I simply lost control of myself and I took my anger out on you."

Well, this was new. Not only was Iason apologizing, he was admitting he had lost control. Riki couldn't help but wonder what was behind the sudden change, but for now it was better to just go along with it. "O...okay. Uh...why were you angry? What did I do wrong?"

"You were thinking of Guy."

Riki frowned in puzzlement and then widened in understanding. How the hell had he known that? Still, he couldn't admit to it. "I....I wasn't I..." He flinched as Iason gripped his chin, brutally between his gloved fingers.

"Don't lie to me, Riki."

"Fine! What if I was? You said you didn't care who I thought about when we...did things."

Iason scowled. "Well, I lied."

"I can't always control my thoughts, Iason. I'm not a fucking emotionless Blondie like you!"

Iason moved closer so their faces were almost touching and he watched Riki swallow, hard. "You think I don't have emotions, Riki?" he asked, dangerously.

Riki realized he would have to answer that question very, very carefully. Of course Iason had emotions, they were just all bad emotions; anger, jealousy, selfishness. "I...I just mean...I can't always tell what you're thinking either. For all I know you could...uh...be thinking of...of...Raoul or someone while we're...having sex."

Iason regarded him quietly, then smiled and shook his head. "I only ever think of you, Riki, as you are the only one I want." He rose, adjusted his gloves. "I would appreciate it if you would show me the same courtesy. It behooves you not to fight me on this, Riki. I do not want you to be thinking of anyone else when you are with me, especially your old pairing partner."

Riki knew he couldn't keep that promise, although in truth, that had been the first time he had thought about Guy while having sex with Iason in a really long time, and that was only because he was doing something new that he hadn't done to Iason before.

"I...I'll try," he offered quietly.

Iason nodded. "Good." He leaned in, kissed Riki lightly on the lips, before rising again. "Now, as I said, Diman and I will be heading out for several hours and Aleia has been given permission to go out and shop or visit the salon. Did you want to go with her..."

"No."

Again, Iason nodded, pleased. He hadn't wanted Riki around the pretty pet on his own either. "As you wish. Why don't you just take an easy day then? Perhaps have Cal set up the whirlpool and have a good soak. Is there anything I can bring you back as a treat?"

While Riki didn't like being compared to a damn dog looking for rewards from his master, he felt the slightest spark of appreciation that Iason would even offer. "I'm almost out of cigarettes."

"Of course you are." Iason rolled his eyes as he pulled on his cloak. "Anything else?"

Riki shook his head.

"We should be back around two or just after." Iason paused in the doorway of the room. "And Riki, I still expect you to behave for our guests when we return."

Riki nodded, waited until Iason stepped out then fell back on the pillows. He hissed. Christ his ass was sore. Maybe that whirlpool thing wasn't a bad idea. He rose, grabbed his robe, which was in the wardrobe next to Iason's much longer one, then pulled his pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket and slipped them into the pocket of his robe as he stepped out of the room. His regular clothes were in his room, and he'd go there to change once he was finished in the tub.

"Good morning, Master Riki. Master Iason has suggested you might like a soak today, would you like to do that before or after breakfast?"

"Before, please. Thanks, Cal."

"Certainly, Master Riki."

Riki stepped out onto the balcony, lit his second to last cigarette and leaned against the railing as he looked towards Ceres. Why did he even bother to look that way anymore, he wondered? Habit? Maybe. He wanted to could go out, not just to the pet designated areas, but outside the city. Anything to get away from this fucking apartment.

He tried not to move too much, even the soft loose fabric brushing against his ass caused him to flinch. Iason really did a number on him, and he still found it hard to believe that Iason had asked him to blow him. Not once in the three years he had been held there had Iason even hinted at such a thing, although the Blondie seemed to enjoy giving him head often enough, especially recently, but that was because he had outlawed Riki touching himself. Even when Riki had been free, he hadn't broken that rule; ashamed to feel anything connected to his time here.

"Master Riki?"

He turned, winced and sighed all at once. "Shit." He ran his hand over his face at his current condition. Did one apology really make up for the things Iason put him through? Hell no it didn't. "Yeah?"

Cal's expression softened. "The tub is ready. I've added some healing salts and..." He lifted his hand and showed the small tube of pain cream. "You should apply this afterwards and it will remove most of the pain."

Riki hated that Cal knew he was in pain, and probably knew why, but he was also grateful for the boy's diligence. He flicked his cigarette over the ledge and stepped inside to take the cream. "You know, Cal. I really wish you'd call me Riki."

Cal offered a small smile. "I know."

Riki smirked, surprised himself by lifting his hand to ruffle the blonde's hair before walking off.

Cal was still standing there in shock that Riki had touched him. He lifted a hand to his hair, closed his eyes. He couldn't remember the last time someone had touched him that hadn't been in punishment. Taking a deep breath to compose himself he headed into the kitchen to see if he had the ingredients to make pancakes, Riki's favorite breakfast.

Riki awoke from his nap, highly aroused and already sweating. He opened his eyes and hissed as Iason's talented fingers continued to play with him. "Oh...you're back," he murmured and then moaned when Iason's hand squeezed him, hard. "Aahhhh...God...fuck....Iason..."

"Interesting succession of words." Iason did it again and Riki reacted much the same. "You look so delicious when you're sleeping, Riki."

Riki couldn't reply and knew that Iason didn't really expect him to. He was already lost to the sensations that only Iason Mink could create in him. He'd had his soak, then a good breakfast and then read for awhile before he grew tired and decided to take a nap. He should have known not to put himself anywhere near a bed when Iason was expected home. He tried to clamp down on his desire, on the urge to scream but that only made the moans and gasped that escaped that much more guttural. "Ias....Iaso....ahhh....f...fuck...stop...."

Iason ignored him and slid a finger into Riki's cavity, watching as the young, lithe body bowed and arched to his touch. "You don't want me to stop."

He didn't, and Riki hated himself for it. He was addicted to Iason's touch. His body, whether conditioned by fate or by design, was open to the Blondie at all times and in all ways. It didn't matter that his mind rebelled and his heart cried each time the physical needs overwhelmed him. He couldn't stop it, not now, not ever, and part of him never wanted to stop it. That was the part that frightened him the most.

When a second finger joined the first, Riki's head almost exploded. "W...wait..." He could feel his orgasm climbing but didn't know if his pet ring would allow him to come, didn't know if Iason would allow it and so he tried to hold back because he knew the pleasure could turn to pain very quickly when it he was denied release. "I can't...Iason...I can't hold..."

"Let go, Riki."

That was all it took. Riki released a guttural cry as his body arched off the bed with the force of his orgasm. He fell limply back against the sheets,

gasping for air.

"You are so beautiful, Riki." Iason said as his mouth made its way up over Riki's chest to encircle one nipple, then the other until his pet was gasping once more. He claimed Riki's mouth, stared, as always at his lover as they kissed to see if this time Riki might close his eyes, but he didn't. He never did and that annoyed Iason for some reason.

He pulled Riki's knees up so that he could enter him, saw the moment of panic that always appeared on Riki's expression and plunged himself inside. He didn't understand why Riki was so afraid of this, his body responded well and Iason could easily make him orgasm again just with thrusting himself deep, but always Riki had that initial look of fear.

He could admit he wasn't always gentle with Riki, especially in the beginning and just after the party he'd brought Riki too after his return. He had been unnecessarily brutal, but he'd tried to be gentle since then to make up for it, trying to win Riki's trust. Well, except for last night anyway. But now he was gentle, he was thrusting slowly and deeply, letting his pet adjust at his leisure.

Riki was writhing beneath him, mewling and gasping as pleasure overtook him, and his hands fisted as he still, even now, tried to resist what his body was doing and feeling. Iason loved the expressions their lovemaking put on Riki's face, it was carnal and seductive and so intensely needy watching this slum mongrel fight and surrender, hold back and release. It was addictive.

"Huuuh...hunnn...hmmmm..." Riki moaned and pressed his feet against the bed to meet Iason's thrusts.

God! God why did he like this so much? How could this man, this intense, manipulative, selfish and sometimes brutal man, make him feel this way? But Iason wasn't always like that. Sometimes, like now, he was soft and gentle and regardless of however else he acted, Iason was intensely beautiful and beyond the comparison of all other men.

Riki's hands wound across Iason's biceps as he grew closer and closer to his next orgasm. The Blondie's face did not sweat, did not change to show any

of his desire, except in those icy blue eyes. There Riki could see the desire, the need and the pleasure that Iason felt and it made him heady just to look into those eyes.

"Hmmm...heeehhhhh....Iason....God...I...." He tossed his head back as speech became impossible, as pleasure took over the very core of his being and he struggled to hold onto something, anything to keep from flying apart. All he could find was Iason, the strong, firm muscles rippling beneath his fingers and he gripped them with an intensity he had never done before.

Iason was entranced by the sight and sounds of his lover as he thrust faster, deeper until he too was very near the edge. He wanted Riki to come first, he always wanted his pet to finish first, to have the pleasure first and when he heard Riki's crying climax he threw his head back, whipping his long hair behind him as he buried himself deep and released.

Iason immediately slid off Riki and pulled him close, his large, long-fingered hands splayed across his lover's chest enjoying the frantic rise and fall of it as Riki battled for breath. He loved how Riki responded to him, loved how breathless and trembling he was afterwards. No other pets had ever reacted the way this mongrel from the slums did. No other pets lost control the way his Riki did, or showed the utter pain and pleasure on their face as Riki did.

It was some time before Riki managed to speak again and when he did it was not what Iason had expected him to say.

"I...need a cigarette."

"No."

"It...calms me."

"It's bad for you."

"You're...bad for me."

Iason smirked. "But I can be good." His hand slid down between Riki's legs again.

"Come on..." Riki groaned and tried to pull away but he was trapped. "It's gonna...fall off."

Iason actually laughed, and could see that the sound startled his pet. No one had ever made him laugh before, he realized.

He rose and pulled Riki with him. "Shower."

"Smoke," Riki countered and stood his ground when Iason pulled on his wrist to go towards the washroom.

Iason's blue eyes glittered dangerously. "Riki."

"I didn't have one at all yesterday."

"You had one this morning."

Fucking tattle-tale Cal.

"That was hours ago..."

Iason yanked on Riki's arm, almost pulling him off balance, proving that resistance was futile. "Shower. Now."

Riki sighed and followed.

Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki is still trying to behave, but Aleia takes matters into her own hands and puts him in a precarious spot with Iason. Will Iason's jealousy get the better of him and will poor Riki suffer further humiliation because of it?

Riki was about to seriously lose his shit. Aleia had been prancing and parading around the main lounge since she returned from shopping, showing off all her new wares to her master and Diman continued to smile indulgently at her as he sipped his drink. She had stopped talking only long enough to stuff her gob at dinner, and then started again. And worse than that, Iason seemed extremely amused by it all.

Riki was settled on the floor leaning against Iason's chair as the Blondie idly played with his hair and the girl continued to pull out purchases from a seemingly endless supply of bags. Seriously, what did one girl need with so much shit?

He looked wistfully towards the glass doors that led to the balcony just a couple of steps away and wondering if he could crawl out there unseen. Probably not, Iason would notice if his finger scratching post was no longer there. Not that he really minded Iason's habit of playing with his hair, it felt nice most days, but it still annoyed him when he had to take it while sitting on the floor like a damn animal.

When a small square box dropped in his lap he started guiltily and tilted his head back to peer at Iason. "What's this?"

"Your treat."

Riki scowled, but opened the box because they had guests and he was expected to. Inside was a small silver-link wrist chain and a tiny band in the shape of a ribbon engraved with his name. He glanced up at Iason again, then back at the gift.

Iason bought him clothes to wear, or rather clothes he wanted to see Riki wearing, and he knew that Iason paid for everything in the apartment and what they ate, but the Blondie didn't usually just buy him gifts and he certainly didn't want or need such things from the android holding him hostage.

But this, this was actually really nice. Riki had seen a similar bracelet only once before, in a shop window in Midas and had admired it. It had cost a small fortune, so he knew he'd never be able to have one, but now here one was. Iason had bought him something that he actually really liked and it even had his name. He never owned anything that had his actual name on it before.

"Do you like it?" Iason asked, his calm, controlled voice revealing none of the uncertainty he was feeling.

He was frustrated that Riki never ever asked him for anything, well, pleading for release or him to stop while they were engaged in sexual activity wasn't quite the same thing. Once or twice he bought a gift on a whim thinking it would suit his pet, but Riki showed no interest or joy in receiving it and would only wear the gifts if he was instructed to.

He had seen the bracelet as he passed a shop on the way home and it had caught his eye. It was simple, yet tasteful. It didn't scream money or status, yet it was refined and made a statement of independence. He knew it would be perfect for his Riki.

"It's..." Riki couldn't believe it, he just couldn't. He didn't want to accept it, didn't want to be grateful for it. He was a pet, just a pet that Iason had done unspeakable things to that had changed his life forever, and yet....

Well, he may be a slum mongrel but even he couldn't be that ungracious. He deliberated how to thank Iason without seeming that he was submitting to him. If it was Guy who had given him something like this he would have hugged him, or enticed a love making session. He could never do that with Iason. Iason was his master and captor, not his lover or his friend.

He rose on his knees beside Iason's chair and offered the bracelet to him. "It's great." He held out his right wrist. "Let's see how it looks." He could easily have handled the clasp himself, but he felt Iason would be pleased to be asked and so that was the best he could do in the way of gratitude; for now anyway.

Iason was shocked to find his fingers were less than steady as he secured the bracelet to Riki's wrist. The fact that Riki actually liked his gift and was willing to wear it pleased him enormously, and it was a true show of gratitude and affection that a pet ask their master specifically to help in putting something on; rather than relying on the furniture. He didn't know if Riki knew this and that was why he had done it, or if his pet was simply being impulsive, but he didn't care because in this moment he was happy.

"It looks very good on you."

Riki rolled his wrist so the light caught the glittering chain. "Yeah, it does." He lifted his gaze. "Thank you."

"Oooh...can I see it?" Aleia walked over as Riki settled on the floor again. She scowled at the bracelet as Riki held up his wrist for her. "It's so plain. There aren't even any jewels and it's very cheap metal. Wouldn't you like it better in Platinum or Meridum?"

"I'm just a slum mongrel," Riki defended and adjusted the bracelet so the ribbon of his name lay flat across the top of his wrist. "What would I be doing wearing jewels and Meridum?"

"But, you're Master Iason's pet and he's the richest Blondie of..."

"Aleia!"

She flinched, spun around and scampered, like an obedient pet, at her master's bark.

"Take your things to your room and remain there for the evening. How dare you impugn a gift of our host, and an Elite, to anyone. Go! Get out of my sight! I will deal with your punishment shortly."

Riki watched her leave and lowered his head. Yeah, she was being annoying, but he didn't want to see her punished just for being a snob.

"My deepest apologies, Iason. I believe her time in the salon with the other pets has gone to her head." Diman smiled at Riki. "And to you as well, Riki. She had no right to say such things to you."

Riki blinked in shock. Two Blondies apologizing to him in one day? Was the apocalypse coming or something? Deciding to test the waters, because his conscience wouldn't let him do otherwise, he said. "I'm sure she didn't mean to be insulting. I am just a plain mongrel so plain gifts suit me better. She is obviously a high end pet and probably wouldn't understand such things. Please don't punish her for it."

Diman sat back in his chair and regarded Riki for such a long time, he began to worry he had gone too far, but when Diman nodded and spoke to Iason he knew he was safe. "I am impressed, Iason. I have never known a pet to speak on behalf of another pet, especially when that pet had been rude to them. Your mongrel may not be as pretty or compliant as those Raoul offers, but he is obviously of much higher caliber."

Iason smiled and his fingers again wound through Riki's hair. "Thank you, Diman. I believe that is indeed the case, although I find Riki exquisitely beautiful as well."

"Don't talk about me like I'm not here," Riki muttered low enough that only Iason could hear him. Iason's response was a sharp tug on his hair. Ow! Motherfucker!

"Yes, I suppose he does have a lovely, exotic charm about him," Diman agreed, amiably. "Will you breed him, Iason, or is he too old now?"

"No, I don't believe I will." Iason would never allow anyone else to touch Riki. Riki was his and his alone. "Many pet owners here look down on him so would not be very interested, I'm afraid."

"Well, perhaps not all of them feel that way, or you could purchase another pet, breed them together and sell the litter."

I'm not a fucking dog you pious, cone-faced dick-smack, Riki fumed silently and, as if Iason could sense he was about to boil over, received another discrete yank against his scalp. Well, he had thought Diman was decent enough, but as usual Blondies always reverted to type; type A for asshole.

"No, one of Riki is about all I can handle right now," Iason tossed carelessly and Diman laughed and finished off his drink.

Riki would never allow any children he fathered to be sold into slavery as furniture or pets, he'd kill the kids first and then himself.

"Well, on that note, I believe I shall retire." Diman rose and smiled down at Riki. "I appreciate you speaking up for Aleia, but she knows she must be punished." He looked at Iason again. "Before I go, Iason, would you mind if I felt Riki's skin? It's so dark and sinewy, and I've never actually touched a mongrel before."

Don't you fucking dare, Iason. Don't you fucking...

"Yes, of course. Riki stand up and allow Diman to touch you."

Bastard! Riki glared at Iason, but rose and kept his eyes lowered as the Blondie ran a hand over his bare arm; the shirt he was wearing was sleeveless.

"Hmmm...I expected it to be rough, but it's actually quite smooth. Not as soft as Aleia's of course." Diman's finger curled around Riki's bicep. "Strong too." He slapped his palm against Riki's chest. "Solid. Yes, quite impressive."

"You want me to suck your dick now?" Riki growled before he could stop himself and watched Diman flinch in horror.

"Riki!"

Riki didn't care if Iason was going to punish him, he wasn't going to be pawed at like a fucking brood mare.

"I apologize for my pet, Diman, he is not used to anyone other than me touching him so he becomes skittish and defensive."

"Y...yes." Diman stepped back and nodded. "Understandable, I suppose. Well, good night, Iason."

When Diman left the room Riki spun and faced Iason.

"Well, what's it gonna be? You gonna fuck me till I bleed or bring out the chains and whips again?" He prayed Iason wouldn't use his pet ring, that was worse than the others.

Iason stepped towards him and Riki forced himself not to retreat. He was on the edge the very fucking edge now and he knew no matter what he said or did he would still be punished, so fuck it. When Iason caught his chin and lowered his head to kiss him, Riki tensed in confusion.

"Oh, Riki." Iason lifted his head and smiled down at his furious and bewildered pet.

Diman and that witless girl of his had been excruciatingly boring and he'd needed something to break the up the monotony. Of course, he knew that Riki couldn't stand for being treated like a real pet was treated; which was why he had granted Diman's request and simply waited for the explosion. It was, perhaps cruel on his part to test his pet, especially as Riki had managed to be on his very best behaviour, but he found, despite the lovely gesture with his bracelet, that a docile Riki was very boring.

"You never cease to amuse me."

"Amuse you? You call that amusing you sick fu...Hmmmmhghhm."

Iason captured his mouth with an intensity that left no room for rebuttal or retreat. He pushed Riki onto the wide sofa, grasping the younger man's wrist in one of his hands and holding them above his head as his free hand slid up inside Riki's shirt and attacked the skin of his chest.

Riki was gasping and moaning within minutes. Iason drove him to such incredible heights of longing and pleasure with just a few simple touches. How was it he could do this? Why did his body have to betray him every damn time?

He was surprised when his orgasm swiftly started to build and dismayed when he felt his cock ring tighten painfully. Shit! That was going to be his punishment. "Oh no," he muttered even as Iason continued to torment him.

"Oh yes, my pet," Iason purred in his ear as he pulled off his glove with his teeth.

Much later, as they lay in Iason's bed, Riki spooned in front of his master and still panting after finally being allowed to come, Iason reached over his pet's shoulders and touched the bracelet on Riki's wrist.

"It really does suit you."

Riki grunted, incapable of speech.

Iason chuckled and rubbed his thumb over Riki's wrist. "Are you tired pet?"

Another grunt.

Iason snuggled closer and heard Riki's mumbled protest as he rubbed a gentle hand over the dark chest. "Sssshh...I just want to hold you," he whispered. "Go to sleep."

He could go again, easily, but he would give Riki a break. Besides, he didn't want to anger his pet enough that he would give back the bracelet.

When Riki sighed and drifted off again, Iason knew that his mongrel was definitely tired. Usually Riki protested being held just for the sake of being held, the same way he refused to hold Iason's hand or initiate a kiss unless ordered to.

And no matter how often Iason embraced him, Riki never returned the embrace. Even when they made love Riki deliberately restricted his touch,

relying instead on occasionally playing with Iason's hair, or very occasionally, gripping the Blondie's arms in the throes of his climax.

He knew that Riki was bored being in the apartment all the time, and he fully understood why his pet didn't want to go out, but he couldn't restrict the actions of other people's pets. Riki had been on his best behavior, as requested, but he knew it was only a matter of time before the cork came off the bottle again. He knew Riki wasn't happy and he wanted to change that. He just didn't know how.

Well, he knew how, but releasing him was not an option and besides, Riki did not seem any happier when he had returned to the slums than he had been living here, at least not according to Katze's reports. No, Riki only thought he wanted freedom, and that was not an option anyway.

There had to be something that he could do for Riki. Perhaps take somewhere nice and quiet where it was just the two of them, or where they could walk and shop and do things together without Riki getting glared at into fights. Riki might try to run, but he wouldn't get far with his pet ring on.

Hmmm...Iason finally let his eyes close. Something to think about.

Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

Aleia is making things difficult for Riki, will Iason punish him for her deeds?

Riki inhaled deeply of his last cigarette, closed his eyes as the nicotine filled his lungs, then opened them again as he looked out over the city. He'd woken several times last night feeling hot and out of sorts, but of course the moment he awoke Iason seemed to sense it and they were off on another sex fest. Now he felt tired, drained and so freaking hot! At least it was cool on the balcony.

He was itching to get out of there, outside the condo, outside Eros and away from Iason's 'guests', but where the hell would he go? He'd given his word to Iason, returned as his pet, but he couldn't handle the salons and stores in the city anymore. He was shunned here, as a pet over the age of twenty and a mongrel no one wanted him here, no one but Iason. Even when he did venture out they goaded him, and Iason had told him that if there was an altercation, regardless of who started it, he would be blamed for it.

He sighed heavily. At least in the slums he had respect, even if some of it was based on fear. Here, he was the only one that was afraid. Here, there was no respect and nothing for him to work toward. He felt...useless and empty.

Thinking of that, his thoughts turned to Mimea, the only woman he had ever been with. Aleia kind of reminded him of her, only with lighter hair. What a fuck up that had been. Iason had been furious, beyond furious that he'd had sex with Mimea, and the punishment far exceeded the crime in his opinion. But, Riki had learned his lesson well. He stayed away from female pets; hell, he stayed away from all other pets and that was easy enough as the other pets had no desire to be anywhere near him either. He was an outcast here, and now even back in the slums where he grew up he no longer belonged.

Guy. He closed his eyes again and took another drag on his cigarette. He missed Guy the most, his pairing partner, his friend, the one person who had always been there for him. He'd made the right choice coming back to Iason. He couldn't let Guy become that bastard's pet, or worse be turned into a brainless sex doll. He'd had to be harsh with Guy, so that his friend wouldn't come after him, but he still missed him terribly.

"What are you doing?"

Riki opened his eyes to see Aleia watching him closely and almost crushed the cigarette between his fingers in anger. Speaking of brainless sex dolls. "Smoking," he replied curtly.

"Can I try it?"

"I don't think your master would like that."

"He lets me do as I like." She moved closer, put her hand on his thigh. "Please?"

Don't touch me, he thought furiously and was surprised by the wave of dizziness that assailed him. What the fuck was wrong with her? Didn't she understand the rules?

He looked through the glass doors to see if Iason could see them. You have no idea what you're in for if you touch me, little girl, or what I'd be in for.

Her hand caressed him. "Please?"

"Fine." He handed her the cigarette and pulled his leg away from her hand. "Just don't touch me."

She smiled, put it between her lips and inhaled as she had seen him do. Almost immediately she started coughing and Riki snatched the cigarette back. "Oh! Oh that's awful! Why do you do that?"

Riki inhaled more smoke into his lungs. "Why not?"

Aleia wiped her watering eyes and managed a smile. "You're different from most pets I know, Riki."

"Yeah."

She studied the wide perch where he sat and tried to lift herself up beside him.

"Don't," he warned.

She smiled and settled for leaning against the barrier. "You're protective of me, that's so sweet."

"I don't give a shit about you."

"Why are you so mean? Don't you like me?" she pouted. "I like you."

"Well....don't." God! He was so hot and his hands were starting to shake. Why couldn't just get away from him?

"You must like me if you're worried I'll fall?"

"If you get hurt, I'm the one who'll suffer for it."

"If your master is so horrible, why not just jump?"

Riki was silent, he wasn't about to discuss Iason or himself with this little twit. He finished off his cigarette and tossed the butt over the side, watched it spiral the long, long way down and then put his hand to his head as he was overwhelmed with a sense of vertigo.

It was a very, very long way down, but he never thought of jumping, of just ending his life and forgetting everything; he simply wasn't geared that way. He was a survivor, and even if that meant staying Iason's pet, he would stay alive for as long as he could.

Swinging around, he hopped down from the ledge, he needed to lie down. He really didn't feel well.

"Shouldn't you be over kissing your master's feet or something?"

She pouted and slid her arms through one of his. "I'd rather be kissing you, Riki."

He shook her off and stepped back. "You don't mean that."

"But I do. My master said that if I liked you he would talk to Master Iason about us breeding together."

Riki's eyes widened. "W...what?"

"That is why we're here, for me to get a mate. My master has heard about you and wanted to see if I liked you." She stepped closer, put her hands seductively against his chest. "The other pets are dull and boring, but you are different. I'd enjoy you mounting me, Riki."

Riki stumbled back as flashes of Mimea assaulted him, and the aftermath of their coupling. "He...no. Iason won't...won't agree to that..."

"Why not?"

"Riki does not mate with anyone, but me, Aleia."

Both pets turned to see Iason standing in the doorway. Riki's bowels turned liquid as he witnessed the cold fury in the Blondie's eyes. No, no, no, no, no! "I didn't do anything," he cried and stepped further back until the rail blocked his escape. "I haven't touched her. I didn't do anything!"

Aleia seemed confused by Iason's words, as pets did not mate with their masters, and was even more confused by Riki's reaction. "I don't understand. I am very high quality and..."

"Riki, come."

Fear and panic rooted Riki to his spot. This wasn't fair! He couldn't go through this again. This wasn't his fault!

Seeing the stark terror in his pet's eyes, Iason stalked towards him and grabbed Riki's wrist. "I said come!"

Riki had no choice but to follow Iason back to their bedroom, and the moment they were inside he started to plead. To hell with his pride he didn't want to be punished like that again. He didn't want to be pumped up on aphrodisiacs and forced to come a hundred times, until he couldn't even scream.

"I didn't do anything!" he whispered. "I didn't touch her! I don't want to touch her! I didn't do anything... don't..." A single tear fell from one eye and his voice turned to a sob. "Iason, please. I didn't do anything." He cried out as Iason yanked him forward into his chest and wrapped his arms around him. "This...this isn't my f...fault!"

Iason held Riki close, his pet was trembling so violently Iason was afraid he might well shake himself apart. He had witnessed many emotions from his young pet over the last several years, anger, need, frustration, belligerence, and even shame, but never fear. Riki had never shown him fear; he had probably felt it many times, but he'd always hide it behind crude words and a vulgar bravado.

Certainly Riki had pleaded with him before, especially when he was being punished, but this was different. He wasn't begging for release or relief, this plea was one of fear and terror. Iason's chest began to ache with a painful throbbing; he didn't understand the feeling, nor was he comfortable with it.

He suddenly wanted nothing more than to go and beat that stupid girl to death. "Sssshhhh," he soothed. "I am not going to punish you, Riki." He heard Riki's sharp intake of breath, felt the young man tense even more.

"You....you're not?"

"No. I know that wasn't your fault. Diman had just finished suggesting the pairing when I came out to find you."

"So...you...you're not...mad?"

"Not at you, no." He caught Riki's chin and forced his pet to look him in the eye, tears streaked down Riki's cheeks unchecked and he pressed his lips to the mongrel's quivering mouth. "I'm not going to punish you."

"I...I don't have to...take...them again?"

"No." Iason knew Riki was referring to the aphrodisiacs. He frowned at the dark flush staining his pet's cheeks and pulled his glove off with his teeth so he could touch Riki's face. "You're burning up, pet."

"I....I....Iason...I can't..."

"Riki!" Iason cried as the younger man suddenly went limp in his arms. "Cal! Cal!"

Iason picked Riki up and placed him gently on the bed as Cal hurried in. "Call for a pet doctor, now!"

"Yes, Master!" Cal hurried back out again, just as Diman stepped into the doorway, curious as to all the commotion.

"Oh, is he ill?" The Blondie asked, curious. "It isn't catching is it? I wouldn't want Aleia to catch something when they..."

Iason walked over and grabbed the Blondie by the shirt front. "Get. Out."

Diman was not used to being spoken to or treated so harshly, but he wisely chose not to argue. There was a fury in Iason Mink's eyes that he had never before experienced and even he wasn't stupid enough to put that fury to the test.

"As you wish."

Iason turned back to Riki and was surprised when once again his chest contracted painfully, but in a different way this time. He sat Riki up, removed his shirt, then his boots and socks and finally his jeans. He realized he had never undressed Riki before, usually Riki did it himself or Cal assisted him. It felt, nice to do this for him.

He pulled the sheets over his pet's body as Cal returned with a cool cloth and bowl of water.

“A doctor is on their way, Master,” the furniture advised as he started to bathe Riki’s face, startled when Iason sat down on the bed and took the cloth from him.

“I’ll do it.”

Cal’s eyes widened for a moment before he returned to his usual blank expression. It was the furniture’s job to take care of the pets! “A...as you like.”

“Go and wait for the doctor.”

“Yes, Master.”

Cal stepped out, closing the door behind him.

Iason soothed the cool cloth over Riki’s face, dipped it in the bowl again, wrung it and repeated. He then pulled the sheet down and bathed the mongrel’s chest, which was also caked with sweat. Normally that would arouse him, but now it only worried him.

“W...what?” Riki began, his eyes fluttering open.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were ill?” Iason demanded as he dipped the cloth in the bowl, then ran it thoroughly over Riki’s right arm.

“A...am I?”

“You have a fever, Riki, and your body is shaking, still.” Iason bathed Riki’s left arm.

Riki tried to focus on the Blondie, was surprised that Iason was tending him. “We...where’s Cal?”

“He’s waiting for the Doctor.” Iason returned the cloth to Riki’s face. “When did you start feeling sick?”

“L...last night. Kept waking up...tried to say but...”

Iason pressed his lips together, because he had selfishly waved off Riki's protests in favour of his own lust. "You could have told me you weren't feeling well."

"Why?"

"I would have stopped."

Riki sighed and closed his eyes. "You never...stop."

Iason's hand stilled. Was he really that bad? Yes, he supposed he was. He only ever thought of himself, didn't he? "I see."

"What about...Aleia?" Riki's eyes watered again. "I didn't touch her, Iason. I wasn't trying to...to make her like me or...or anything...I..."

Iason had thought Riki's fear had been due to his illness, but he could see now that that of all the punishments he had subjected his pet to that one time after Mimea had severely traumatized his beloved.

"They're gone. Forget about them." He brushed his hand over Riki's hair. "I won't let anyone else have you, you know that. I am not pleased that this was the real reason for Diman's visit, but I will deal with him accordingly."

Riki was so relieved that Iason believed him he felt another tear slip out. "Damn it!" He swiped at his face, bitterly.

Iason caught Riki's chin. "You are mine, aren't you, Riki?"

Riki stared into Iason's eyes and knew he could no longer deny it, knew that if he tried to deny it things could turn much worse for him. "Yes," he whispered and watched the Blondie's eyes darken with heat and victory.

"Yes." Iason repeated softly and wondered again why it was so hard for Riki to say. He cupped Riki's face between his hands and kissed him gently, just as Cal appeared and advised that the Doctor was there.

"Iason..." Riki reached for the Blondie's hand before he could stop himself. "T...thank you."

Iason smiled, nodded and moved aside for the doctor to do what was needed.

It took no time at all for a diagnosis, Riki's illness was caused by stress and fatigue. The doctor suggested Riki remain in bed for the next day and a half, eat good solid foods and refrain from any physical exertion. He prescribed some pills for the fever and chills.

After the Doctor left Iason settled again by Riki's side and helped his pet sit up to take the medication.

"I can do it," Riki muttered as he took the glass of water from Iason, then almost dropped it all over himself because his hands were still shaking.

"So I see." Iason wrapped his hand around Riki's so they were both holding the glass and held it to the young man's lips.

Riki was nearly dying of thirst so he didn't protest further and swallowed almost the entire glass. He dropped back against the pillows and pushed the sheets off of him, only to have Iason cover him again. "I'm hot!"

"You have a fever, you need to stay covered, Riki."

"But I'm hot!"

Iason smirked at the petulance in Riki's voice. "Keep them on, Riki," he ordered in his obey-me-or-suffer-later voice. "The medication you took will begin to work shortly and you won't be as hot."

"I want a cigarette."

"No."

"Come on!"

Iason smiled, leaned down and kissed him again. "Be a good boy and stay covered and I'll have Cal make you a special treat for dinner."

Riki's head was swimming and he was trying to understand what Iason was up to. "What...kind of special treat?" he found himself asking and hated himself for it.

"Anything you like."

Riki didn't know what he would like, he was too exhausted and hot to think about it. "Something...cold," he murmured and wondered if the medication was kicking in. He felt like he was floating. "Maybe...ice...cream."

"Okay, you can have ice cream. What flavor?"

"Don't know. Never had it before."

Iason's eyes widened in surprise. "Never?"

"No." Riki's eyes started to close and in moments he had drifted off.

Iason sat there watching him for a long time, before quietly rising and stepping out of the room. He found Cal and told him to fetch a dozen different flavors of ice cream.

"Hey," Guy greeted as Riki entered the apartment. "Where have you been?"

"Out." Riki pulled something from his jacket pocket and tossed it at his pairing partner. "Catch."

Guy caught the small tin of spice. "Hey! You found some!"

"That's the one you like, right?"

Guy nodded, set the tin on the counter of the small kitchenette as Riki pulled off his jacket. He wrapped his arms around Riki from behind and inhaled deeply. "Do I want to know what you had to do to get it?"

Riki smirked. "Simon owed me a favor, that's all."

"Good ol' Simon." Guy turned him and claimed Riki's lips in a deep soulful kiss that Riki responded eagerly to, resting his hands on the taller man's hips. "I made Goulash for dinner."

"Yeah? My favorite."

"I know."

"Are you sucking up for any particular reason?"

"Nope. Just felt like making it." Guy pulled away. "Ready to eat then?"

Riki caught his hand, he could always see the need in his partner's eyes. Guy tried to hide it, tried not to be clingy, but he knew Guy missed him whenever he was gone as much as he had been this week.

He carefully walked Guy backwards to their bed. "Let's have desert first."

"R...really?"

Riki pulled his shirt over his head as guy did the same with his. "Yeah. Show me how much you appreciate that spice I got for you." He laid his body against Guy's as he gently licked and nipped his way across his lover's throat and chest. Guy moaned and sighed beneath him and reached between them to grip Riki.

"I'll show you."

"Okay." Riki dropped onto his back as Guy climbed over him and released the fastener of his trousers. He pulled Riki's boots off and then his pants and underwear followed. Guy's mouth was on him moments later and he closed his eyes and lost himself in the sensation. "Slow down," he murmured. "You don't have to rush."

Guy nodded and did as instructed. "I want you inside me, Riki."

"I will be, just go slow."

Riki sighed and lifted his arms over his head, as the day's events played through his mind and he tried to figure out how to use the extra favors he had gathered. He was startled when Guy slid up and straddled him, now also naked, and lowered himself over him.

Anxious little thing, Riki thought mildly and gripped Guy's hips as the taller man rode him with wild abandon, so that they were both coming mere minutes later.

Guy dropped down onto Riki, panting. "S...sorry. Been holding that in...for awhile."

Riki smirked, kissed him and then gently pushed him off. "Perv." He reached towards the bedside table for his cigarettes then realized they were in his jacket. "Shit."

"I'll get them." Guy rose retrieved the pack, then pulled out a stick, put it between his lips and lit it. He walked back and handed the cigarette to Riki as he lay beside him again. "I wish you'd cut down, Riki. They're gonna kill you one day."

"There are worse ways to die in the slums, Guy." Riki inhaled deeply as his thoughts turned murky.

"I'm serious. They're dangerous."

"Hmmm." Riki inhaled again, then grabbed Guy by the hair, pulled him closer and pressed their mouths together so the smoke he'd been holding blew into Guy's mouth. Guy coughed and tried to push him away, but not very hard.

"Fuck, Riki!" Guy wiped at his mouth and wheezed when Riki released him. "What was that for?"

"Now we can die together," Riki teased, and was startled when Guy swiped his cigarette and suddenly pinned him to the bed.

"Don't say that!" Guy warned with a frantic look. "Don't ever talk about dying, Riki."

Riki gaped at him. "Everybody dies, Guy..."

Guy folded and crushed Riki to him. "Then promise we will go together, Riki. I can't live without you."

Riki held Guy, he had little choice, appalled at the confession. "Hey. Hey where is this coming from?"

Guy shook his head and held him tighter. "I just...I've been having a bad feeling lately, a really bad feeling. I'm worried about you, Riki."

"Well don't be. I know what I'm doing. Come on." Riki managed to loosen Guy's hold enough that he could look the younger man in the eyes. "You know I want to get out of here, Guy."

Guy's face turned to fury. "No! You can't leave me! I won't let you leave me!" Guy suddenly adjusted his position and slammed himself into Riki, with no preparation.

Riki screamed and tried to push Guy off him. "Stop! It hurts, Guy! Fuck, stop!"

"You're mine! You are mine. No one else can have you!"

Riki, who had squeezed his eyes shut at the sudden intrusion opened them again and saw Iason hovering over him, his cold, calculating face staring down as he continued to thrust into Riki's softer, smaller body.

"Guy!" he cried out but he couldn't see his pairing partner anymore. "Guy!"

He met Iason's gaze again and saw something he had never seen before, defeat.

"I'm sorry, Riki."

Flames grew around the bed, crawling up over the edges, burning the sheets and then they started to lick and consume the Blondie's skin.

“No! Get off! Get off!” Riki tried to bat the flames down with his hands, tried to keep them from burning Iason and himself. “Iason! Iason!”

Riki cried out in the darkness as he bolted upright in bed, breathing heavily and painfully aroused.

“Riki?” Iason sat up and touched his shoulder. The young man had slept through most of the day, waking only once when Cal roused him to take his medication, before drifting off again. “What is it, pet?”

“N...nothing.” Riki lay back down and turned away, pulling the sheets up around his neck. “Ju...just a dream.”

Iason slid his arm around Riki’s waist and pulled him against him. “Do you wish to talk about it?”

“No.” He didn’t want to talk about it and he didn’t want Iason to touch him, but he had no choice in the matter.

“You’re upset.”

“I’m fine.”

“Very well.” Iason’s free hand wound through Riki’s hair in a slow soothing caress. “Settle down then.”

Riki tried to settle, despite the fact that he remained stiff in Iason’s arms. Why was he dreaming of Guy now? He hadn’t had a dream about Guy since before he left Eos the first time. The first half of it wasn’t really a dream, he remembered that day he had gotten the spice for Guy, it had been just a couple of weeks before he went to work for Katze; before he finally got away from the slums.

Guy had been especially needy that day, but he hadn’t been forceful or anything, so why had the Guy in his dream turned into such a clinging nightmare. And then Guy becoming Iason...Well, he supposed he could understand that, but what was with the fire? Why the hell was he dreaming of Iason burning?

Iason's fingers in his hair felt oddly soothing and he started to relax, despite himself. He half expected the Blondie to make the moves on him again, especially since he had been aroused when he woke, but Iason simply held him and caressed his hair, and slowly his arousal died as well as his fear from the dream.

He felt Iason's hand slide down from his hair to press against his forehead. Iason had such big hands and they were always cool, they felt good against his skin.

"Your fever's down."

"Yeah."

"Are you feeling better?"

"Some."

Iason lifted up and peered down at Riki, the moonlight streaming in through their windows was just enough for him to Riki's face. "Would you like your ice cream now?"

Riki blinked. "Huh?"

"You asked for ice cream, before you fell asleep. Would you like some?"

He'd asked for ice cream? Why couldn't he remember that? He looked at the clock by their bed. "It's the middle of the night."

"Yes, but you've been sleeping all day." Iason rose and reached for his robe. "You'll have to eat something solid first, but you must be hungry by now." He grabbed Riki's robe and extended his hand. "Come, Riki."

Riki hesitated only a moment longer, then realized he was pretty hungry so he tossed back the sheets and rose, the minute he tried to stand he swayed and almost fell, but Iason caught him.

"What the hell is wrong with me?"

“You’re ill.” Iason helped him into his robe and wrapped his arm around Riki’s waist to help support him. “Shall I carry you?”

“No, it’s just...My legs feel weird,” he murmured as they stepped out of the bedroom and headed to the kitchen. “Why do my legs feel weird?”

“Define weird,” Iason suggested as he flicked on the lights to the kitchen and guided Riki over to one of the stools at the kitchen island.

“Heavy, like they can’t remember how to walk.”

“It may be a side effect of the medication.”

“Master?” Cal’s blond head appeared from the doorway at the back of the kitchen, where his room was. “Did you require something?”

“No, we’re fine, go back to sleep.”

Cal nodded and closed his door as Iason opened the large refrigerator, rummaged in it for a moment then came out with a plate of ribs and a tub of salad.

“This will do,” he decided and started going through the cupboards to find the plates, he wasn’t used to being in the kitchen; Cal did all the cooking, cleaning and serving.

“Left of the sink,” Riki finally told Iason, helping the Blondie find the plates. “Lower right drawer is the silverware.”

Iason didn’t bother to ask how Riki knew the layout of the kitchen so well. He gathered what they needed, then poured himself a glass of wine and Riki a glass of water, before settling on the stool next to him. “Eat this and you can have some ice cream.”

Riki picked up a rib with his fingers and bit into it, it tasted good, even cold. “You don’t have to stay up with me,” he said, noticing that Iason wasn’t eating. “You have to work tomorrow, right?”

“I’ll be fine, I don’t need much sleep.” Really Iason didn’t need any, he just chose when to sleep and when to be awake. Besides, he was really enjoying watching his pet eat.

Riki hadn’t realized how hungry he was until he had finished off half of the ribs and almost a full plate of salad. When he glanced at Iason he was surprised to find the Blondie smiling at him and flushed. “Uh...I guess I was hungry.”

“So it seems.” Iason caught Riki’s sauce covered fingers and placed them in his mouth, individually licking and sucking the sauce off of each digit.

Riki closed his eyes as he grew hard beneath the robe and wished his body wasn’t such a slut around Iason.

“Room for ice cream?”

Riki’s eyes popped open. He’d expected Iason to keep going with the seduction. “Do...do you really have any?”

Iason rose, moved to the freezer where he had seen Cal place the small cartons. He took out all twelve, set them on the island, then grabbed two spoons.

“Wh...why are there so many?”

“You said you hadn’t had it before, so I wanted to get a flavor you liked.”

Riki stared at him stunned and grew uncomfortable. This was starting to feel too...normal; too domesticated.

Iason opened the cartons and pushed a chocolate one towards him. “Try it.”

“Iason....”

“Try it. You said you have never had it before. How can you pick a favorite if you do not taste them all, and if there are none here like any of them I’ll have Cal order more for you.”

Riki's hand curled into a fist around the spoon Iason had forced into his hand. "You...you didn't...you don't have to do that."

Iason stared at him, sighed. "Can't you accept even this insignificant gesture? You are sick it was entirely my fault for not noticing. I am trying to do something nice for you."

"I don't want you to do nice things for me."

"Why not?"

Riki was silent.

"Are you afraid you might actually stop hating me so much if you accept something from me?"

That was exactly it and Riki cursed the Blondie's perceptiveness.

"It is just ice cream, pet." Iason scooped up some of the chocolate with his spoon and held it to Riki's mouth. "Open."

Riki stared at him, mutinously.

Fine, Iason sighed inwardly, if that was how it had to be, so be it. "Riki, you know what will happen if I have to repeat myself."

Riki gritted his teeth and opened his mouth. Immediately the cold, flavored treat touched his tongue and he closed his eyes at the sensation. Oh. My. God. It was...amazing. It didn't taste anything like he expected it to, it was so much better than that, and it just melted in his mouth and left his taste buds tingling.

Realizing he had let himself get carried away by the sensation he reluctantly opened his eyes and saw Iason watching him with a smirk.

"Shall we try another flavor?"

Riki flushed, and couldn't help wonder if they all tasted that good. "I...like this one," he muttered and watched as Iason gathered another spoonful. Riki

opened his mouth and again shivered at the delightful taste of the treat.

“My, that is a look I have never seen before,” Iason murmured and promptly kissed Riki, darting his tongue thoroughly into the younger man’s mouth to get a taste of the ice cream before it melted. He pulled back, stared into Riki’s dark eyes and licked his lips. “Mmmm....yes, quite nice.”

The ice cream was not overly sweet, or perhaps the cold made it taste less sweet than it looked. Still, the real ambrosia was watching Riki’s face melt with each bite, he was already painfully aroused by just that.

Riki ducked his head, blaming his illness and the medication for making him feel shy as he reached for a multicolored ice cream and started to dip his spoon in. He wasn’t really surprised when Iason took the spoon so he could feed him again. He sighed.

“Are you gonna feed me all of them?”

“Perhaps.” Iason smirked. “Open.”

Riki gave up and opened his mouth, accepting the spoonful. He let it melt slowly in his mouth then shook his head and pushed that carton away. “Too much.”

Iason nodded and pulled a green ice cream towards him with dark chunks of chocolate. “Let’s try this one.”

“It’s green,” Riki said dubiously.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover, pet.”

Riki tasted the ice cream and blinked in surprise. “Okay...that...that’s pretty good too.”

“As good as the chocolate?”

“No.”

Iason smiled and reached for another carton.

They continued to taste the ice cream, with Iason feeding Riki by the spoonful, and any of the ones Riki liked, Iason fed him a second spoonful and took a taste via kiss. By the time they were finished tasting them all, Riki had picked a maple walnut flavor and they had eaten half of the carton before Iason warned it was enough. He didn't want Riki to get more sick.

Riki had a smudge of ice cream on the corner of his mouth and Iason leaned in to lick it off, which of course led to yet another kiss, which of course, led to Iason's hands sliding beneath Riki's robe to fondle him. Riki, already panting from all the shared kisses, was, as always helpless and responded to each of Iason's touches, then gasped when the Blondie suddenly stopped.

"We should go back to bed." Iason stated and returned the ice cream to the freezer and headed back to the bedroom.

"Are you feeling better, pet?" Iason asked as they climbed back into bed.

"Yeah, no longer as hot anyway." Riki could tell from the lust in Iason's eyes that they wouldn't be going to sleep any time soon, and his body was already in a high state of arousal, so he wouldn't object. He could plead he was still tired and sick, Iason might even reconsider, but damn that ice cream had been really good, so he felt he owed Iason a treat of his own. "I...I guess you want to do it to me, now, right?"

Iason turned off the light and pulled Riki against him. "More than you could possibly imagine." He nuzzled Riki's neck, then lay his head next to Riki's on the pillow. "But you're not to have any physical exertion right now, so go back to sleep."

Seriously? Iason was going to let him rest? Seriously? "Uh..." Why did he feel disappointed? What the hell was wrong with him? He couldn't sleep like this! "I...but..." He bit his lip and pushed his face into the pillow. He sure as hell was not going to ask for it, he didn't care how aroused he was.

"Something wrong, pet?"

"No."

Iason smiled and let his hand wander down to Riki's hardened member, he felt his pet tense and then push into his hand almost automatically. "You are in a state, aren't you?"

"Fuck off."

Iason started to stroke him. "Well, we can't have that. You'll never be able to get to sleep."

"I'm f...ahh..fine...st....haa....wait...." Riki shut his eyes tightly and gripped the edges of his pillow. He started thrusting into Iason's large, cool hand. So close! He was already so damn close! "The...ring....Iloosen it...please."

Iason did and Riki came a few minutes later.

Panting, his head swimming, his body trembling once again, Riki could not even move as Iason licked his fingers clean, then lay down again and slowly stroked his hair.

"Go to sleep, Riki."

Riki was already half way there. "'kay."

Notes for the Chapter:

So, I know the food in this story is probably not something that they would have on this world, but the whole scene in the kitchen was out of a dream so I had to stick to it. Hope you don't mind. :-)

Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

Diman learns that Iason Mink is no one to be trifled with

“Is the mongrel better?”

Iason glanced up at Diman the following morning with a coldness that was unmatched by any other Blondie. Diman had not taken his instruction to get out to heart, and had instead taken his pet and gone to a sex party last night to the early hours. They had returned and Iason allowed them to, and now the Blondie was acting as if he had done nothing wrong.

Riki was right, some elites were obtuse. It appeared he would have to be more direct with this one. Still, Diman was also a Blondie so he couldn't simply rend him limb from limb as he desired.

“He is resting still,” Iason stated, betraying none of the rage he was feeling as Diman settled on the large sectional opposite his host as Cal entered and offered him a beverage. “How was your evening?”

Diman waved his hand. “Same as it always is there, nothing has changed since I was gone. I allowed Aleia to pair up with one of Raoul's pets and one of Samels, as she was so upset over Riki.”

“Upset?”

“Yes. She was looking forward to being mounted by that mongrel of yours, Iason.” Diman smiled wistfully. “I can't say that I approved of her tastes, but she's such a good pet, and is very particular about her who she breeds with. I try to give her some leeway when I can and she had her heart set on Riki.”

“You allow your pet to decide who she has sex with?” Iason asked.

“No, of course not. She has been bred three times already and I got four pups out of it, apparently her breed favors twins. They brought me a very good price, and because she had done so well, I did promise to let her chose the next one. That was why she wanted to see about this mongrel of yours.” Diman sipped his drink. “I have been off planet for several years and am unaware of any changes in the pet laws, so I am curious, Iason. Why is it you do not breed your pet with anyone?”

“As I explained before, Diman, he is a slum mongrel and most do not wish to breed with him.”

“Well, I don’t know that I would go that far. I made a few inquiries last night and learned that there were a couple of people who would be interested in the idea, if nothing else to see what sort of pup comes of the pairing.”

“You said that you were here under Jupiter’s instruction, Diman. Are you telling me that Jupiter approved this visit simply for your pet to get a breeding partner?”

Diman smiled. “Of course not, our visit was for business purposes, Riki was the side benefit.”

“I see.” Iason steepled his fingers under his chin and glanced out the balcony doors.

If Riki was his usual self he’d be out there smoking right now. While he did not approve of the habit, he had to admit he liked to watch Riki smoke. His pet always had such interesting and thoughtful expressions when he was out on the balcony and Iason wished that he could learn what Riki was thinking at those times. But Riki would never share such things with him, only bits and pieces that he was forced to share. Iason found it incredibly annoying.

“Since you broached the subject, you are aware that the pet law states a pet may not touch another pet outside of a social engagement, correct?”

Diman blinked. “Yes, of course.”

“Then why is it your pet had her hands on Riki yesterday?”

Diman shrugged. “She was a little eager I agree, however as you seem to have ignored most of the laws yourself regarding this mongrel, I can hardly be faulted for allowing Aleia a similar freedom.”

“And that is your mistake.”

Diman straightened suddenly, the harshness in Iason’s tone was worrisome. “Mistake? I do not believe I have made any mistakes, Iason. I am a Blondie, and a member of the Tanagura Syndicate, as you are. You cannot tell me how to treat my pet anymore than I can tell you how to treat Riki. Unlike our brothers on the board, I do not care if you chose to use the mongrel at your leisure or treat him as a companion instead of a pet, that is your business. Aleia is my business and I like to give her the things she wants. What she wants is Riki.”

Iason stared at him. “I see.”

“Now, I am not unreasonable, but if the things I have seen here were to be reported to the Syndicate, I have no doubt that they would step in to remove that mongrel from you.”

“And what is it you intend to report, Diman?”

“Why, the fact that you allow that pet to eat at your table, that you sleep with it in your bed. You allow it to speak to its betters without punishment or recourse. You are abusing your authority and flouting the pet laws in every way, Iason. Surely, you do not want Jupiter and the other Blondies to discover your shame?”

Diman was referring to Riki as it instead of him now and showing his true colors. As he had been off planet for so long, he was unaware that Jupiter and the other Bondies were, at least in some capacity, aware of Riki’s situation.

Iason had jumped through hoops for them, leashing Riki in public, showing him at parties and the like in order to be able to bring Riki back to Eos.

Granted they were not completely aware of his relationship with Riki, but it was not their business. As long as Riki behaved in public, the other Blondies had been appropriately mollified to accept his presence. Now someone was threatening the peaceful compromise that Iason had managed to attain and he was not about to allow anyone to interfere with his plans.

Very well, Iason thought, I've seen your colors, now I shall show you mine. "I assume you wish compensation for your silence then?"

"Come now, let us not talk of such things. We are the sons of Jupiter and above that sort of thing. I simply encourage you to allow Riki to mount my Aleia, two or three times should do it, as she is close to her breeding cycle, then we'll forget the whole thing and move on."

Iason nodded, even as a vision of his pet fucking Aleia entered his mind and rage filled him. Still, his calm demeanor did not change. "It seems reasonable, certainly," he allowed then picked up the file folder that had been on the sofa beside him. "Cal, give this to our guest."

Cal, as the perfect furniture, was standing just outside of the Blondie's line of vision waiting for instruction, and quickly moved to accept the file and passed it to Diman.

"Now," Iason began crossing one long leg over the other as Diman opened the file, started to read and then immediately tensed.

"You are quite correct in acknowledging that I would prefer to keep my private life private. What I do in the convenience of my own home is no one's business, and while there are other Blondies, like yourself, who would dispute that issue," Iason's eyes narrowed coldly. "I do not answer to you or to them. I am Iason Mink. I am the favoured son of Jupiter and need only report to her. I act on behalf of Jupiter and if you are threatening me, you are threatening her."

"I would never do such a thing!" Diman glared at him. "Are you telling me that Jupiter approves of what you are doing?"

“I am telling you that it is not your concern. As you can see by that file I am aware of your black market dealings and the illegal permits you acquired for several of your casinos in Midas as well as your ones off planet.”

This in itself was not a problem, because Iason was fully aware of the underworld, thanks to Katze. He didn't care about those dealing in the black market and usually turned a blind eye to it, but it was always good to have such information at his fingertips.

“As a Tanagura Blondie and businessman you are required to obtain the proper permits for any new properties, and...” Iason accepted the glass of juice that Cal brought him, as usual anticipating his needs. “The percentage that the syndicate takes from those businesses. According to my information, you have used black market technology to doctor your reports and your receipts. You have not been paying your proper percentage to the Syndicate, Diman.”

Diman sat the file down, picked up his drink again, but his hand shook slightly when he took a sip. Iason had effectively uncovered that he was stealing from his brothers, the elites, such an offense could have him executed. “It seems we are at an impasse then,” he tossed with less confidence than he felt. “Very well then, I will keep your secrets and you will keep mine and we will say no more about it.”

Iason sipped his juice then tilted his head. “Are you under the impression that this is a negation, Diman?”

“What do you mean?”

“You lied to me. You lied to the members of the board, of which you are still a part of. You have hidden tributes from the Syndicate, engaged in black-market activity, falsified records, misrepresented yourself and Jupiter for this visit and...” Iason set his glass aside and rose suddenly to his full and imposing height. “You allowed your pet to touch something that was mine without permission. You must never touch what is mine, Diman. That is an unforgivable slight.”

Diman rose slowly. “Iason, you are being unreasonable.”

“I am the leader of the Tanagura Syndicate. You have stolen from me, lied to me, threatened and offended me; all very unreasonable actions which do not require a reasonable response.”

“What is it you intend to do then?”

What Iason wanted to do was throw the bastard and his pet off his balcony and watch until they hit bottom. But, killing a Blondie, regardless of the crime against him, was frowned upon and he knew that he would suffer repercussions from the other Syndicate members. Luckily, he had visited Jupiter last night and had discussed the crime, along with an appropriate solution.

“I have brought your crimes to Jupiter’s attention.”

Diman actually stumbled a bit. “How dare you! How dare you discuss...”

“I have decided your punishment and she concurs with my decision,” Iason interrupted. “The other members will not be made aware of your discrepancies only if you abide by my conditions for your punishment.”

Diman considered this. If his brothers found out what he had done he would lose everything, his properties, his status, everything. They might even call for his head. He really had no choice, but to agree to Iason’s terms. “What is it you have decided, then?”

“First you will immediately pay back what you owe on your dues, plus an interest rate of thirty five percent.”

“Thirty five!!!” Diman sputtered, then forced himself to calm down. “Fine, what else.”

“Secondly, as your pet seems so eager to touch what doesn’t belong to her, she will be the main attraction at the breeding parties for the next three years. You will allow her to breed for free and any pups you get from her will be sold and that amount will also be given to the Syndicate, the full amount.”

“Free! Then she will be useless to me.”

“That is not my concern. After the three years you can do as you like with her.”

Diman scowled but nodded.

“Third, you are forbidden from taking part in the Syndicate meetings for those three years, and you will move your residence to one of the outer regions. You will return to Tanagura only to submit your pet for the parties. You are forbidden from going off planet for any reason during this time.”

“This is outrageous! I have dealings off world that I need to see to personally, otherwise I could lose them entirely! How dare you ban me from Tanagura! Who do you think you are?”

Iason’s expression did not change, he simply sat down again and picked up his juice to take a sip. “If you fail to meet any of the terms I have set out, Jupiter will wipe your mind.”

Diman gaped at him. “I am a Blondie! One of her sons!!!”

“And you have disappointed her. Jupiter can be a very unforgiving mother.” Iason spoke from experience. Jupiter had subjected him to very invasive and often painful mind melds after he had released Riki the first time, and he hoped to never go through that again.

Diman curled his hands into fists in an unusual show of anger for an elite. “You would do all of this to protect that mongrel?”

“I would do this and more to protect what is mine.” Iason’s hard gaze eyes met Diman’s over his glass of juice. “You would do well to remember that.”

“It appears I have no choice but to do as you say.”

“So it appears.”

“After the three years, I assume I can resume normal business and social activities?”

“Of course. However, I will caution you Diman. If you are considering future revenge, I would advise against it. Jupiter can be a hard and unforgiving taskmaster, however she does have what she considers personal and social limits.” Iason met Diman’s gaze directly, his blue eyes as cold as ice and as unforgiving as death itself. “I have no such limits.”

Diman swallowed, hard, then nodded. “Understood. Aleia and I will take our leave of you then.”

“I believe that would be for the best. You have ten days to pay back what you owe to the Syndicate.” Iason indicated the file. “The total is noted there for your reference.”

“Of course.” Diman moved off toward the guest rooms to find his pet and collect his belongings.

Iason rose. “Cal, make sure they both leave quietly. I do not want Riki disturbed.”

“Yes, of course.” Cal nodded and followed Diman discretely.

Iason headed in to the other side of the condo where the master bedroom was and opened the door, Riki was awake and out of bed, searching through his jacket pockets. He had pulled on a pair of black jeans but nothing else.

“You are supposed to be resting,” Iason warned.

“Where did you put them?” Riki demanded and moved back to the bedside table to rummage through the drawers.

“Put what?”

“My god damn cigarettes!”

“Didn’t you say you were out?”

“Shit!” Riki dropped down on the bed and ran his hand through his hair. “I smoked the last one yesterday. Shit!”

“You should not be smoking anyway, you’re ill.”

“I feel fine!” he groaned and fell backwards on the bed. He was craving a smoke so bad he was about to crawl the walls! “I wanna smoke!”

Iason sighed and walked over to where he had hung his main cloak yesterday. He reached into the pocket and pulled out the package of cigarettes, watched his pet's eyes widen in surprise. "I bought these for you the other day and neglected to give them to you."

Riki bolted off the bed, but Iason merely held the pack over his head, out of Riki's reach.

“Is that anyway to ask for something you want?” Iason teased.

“C...can I please have a cigarette?” Riki asked through gritted teeth.

“What will you give them for me?”

Riki glared at him, mutinously. “What do you want?” he finally asked.

“A kiss will do.” Riki had never initiated a kiss, so it would be interesting to see if his craving for the cigarettes would outweigh his pride.

Riki shuffled on his feet for a few seconds then sighed and tipped his head upwards. “Fine.” After a few moments when Iason made no move to dip his head to take his kiss, Riki growled. “Well? Are you going to kiss me or not?”

“I thought you’d never ask.” Smiling Iason bowed his head and covered Riki's mouth with his in a slow, passionate kiss, delighted that his pet was already panting by the time he ended it. “Thank you, pet.”

“Smoke,” Riki reminded, hating that he had gotten so easily aroused by a stupid kiss.

“Bed.”

Riki gritted his teeth, he should have known it wouldn't be that easy. "I need a smoke!"

"Get back into bed, Riki."

Riki muttered under his breath, shucked his pants and crawled between the sheets again. "Fine, come fuck me so I can smoke then."

Iason raised an eyebrow as he walked over. "You are in a state aren't you?"

"Just...let's get it over with."

Iason walked to the bed, pulled a single stick out of the pack and placed it between Riki's surprised lips. He then took the lighter Riki had curled in his hand and lit the end of the cigarette.

"Only one, Riki," he said, seeing the question in his pet's eyes. "In here just this one time," Iason set the pack and lighter on the bedside table.

Riki inhaled deeply while he had the chance. "Why?" Iason never allowed him to smoke inside the condo and certainly not in his bedroom.

"Because you still need to rest." Iason pulled the covers up tighter around Riki as his pet sat against the headboard, smoking. "And you asked so nicely."

Riki smirked, inhaled gratefully and slowly breathed out the smoke. "Fucker," he muttered under his breath.

Iason ignored the insult, rose and opened the windows around the room, then returned to the bed and affectionately ruffled Riki's hair. "Try to sleep some more once you're done and then you can get up for lunch."

"Iason?" Riki began as the Blondie moved to the door.

"Yes?"

"Are Diman and Aleia really gone?"

“They’re leaving now.”

Riki nodded, inhaled again as he lowered his eyes. “What are you going to do to them?”

“It’s been taken care of, pet.”

Riki felt he should plead for Aleia at least, he didn’t blame her for being stupid and while he didn’t give two fucks about Diman, he would hate to see Aleia punished too harshly. Still, if he spoke up for her, Iason might misunderstand him and think he had feelings for the girl, which would put him back in the shit again. It wasn’t right the way Iason did whatever he wanted without facing consequences. It wasn’t right that he could cause so much pain to others without any guilt.

He sighed heavily, stuck.

“What is it, Riki?”

“I...nothing. I just...” Riki chewed his lower lip and picked at the sheets rather than meet Iason’s gaze. “Nothing.”

“You are worried for her.”

Riki’s head shot up and a flicker of fear wavered across his face. “I don’t care about her!”

Iason walked over, sat down on the bed. “Yet you feel responsible for her.”

“No. It...it’s not that. I just...I know how hard it is to be...punished and I know what she did was bad but she’s just a girl and...and it isn’t all her fault.”

“Are you asking me for leniency for her, Riki?”

Riki considered the question. He didn’t usually ask Iason for anything unless he was forced to. Asking for leniency would be pointless, because Iason had no concept of regret or guilt. He did whatever he wanted and felt

nothing about it. Besides, if he did ask for leniency, what would Iason ask of him in return for such a favour? No, it was better not to get involved.

“No.”

Iason nodded and rose. He knew his pet had a strong moral obligation on certain issues, but he was glad to see Riki had finally learned to consider his own best interests first in such things. “I’ll send Cal in when it’s time for dinner.”

“Yeah.”

Riki watched Iason leave, pulled his legs up to his chest and puffed on his cigarette. Pets were the lowest form of trash, and he was certainly living up to that now. He couldn’t, wouldn’t risk pissing Iason off, or worse being indebted more to the Blondie in order to save a girl he hardly knew. He’d become the scum everyone said he was.

“I’m sorry, Aleia.”

Chapter 7

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason decides to have dinner on the balcony and Riki grows suspicious

When Cal called Riki for dinner, it took Riki a moment to focus, as he had dozed off again.

“Yeah, I’m just gonna take a quick shower first,” he called back and moved to the washroom. After almost two days in bed he felt sweaty and sluggish. He took a very quick shower, then brushed his teeth only because they needed it, and not because Iason disliked the taste of cigarettes on him, or as any kind of concession for the Blondie's earlier thoughtfulness.

Cal had selected his clothes for him, probably as per Iason’s order, and had placed them on the bed. Dressing in navy dress slacks, socks and a soft, cream colored shirt, Riki stepped out of the room.

He was surprised to find no one in the dining room when he entered. “What the hell?” He started towards the parlor and was intercepted by Cal.

“The meal is served on the balcony this evening, Master Riki.” The blonde held up a short, navy tailored jacket that matched Riki's slacks. "It is chilly outside, you may need this."

“Uh...okay.” The fancy clothes made Riki feel uncomfortable, but whatever.

They had never eaten outside before, and he shrugged into the jacket as he made his way to the balcony, where he saw that a small intimate table had been set up with two chairs and candlelight.

Iason who stood at the balcony looking out over the city, dressed in his blue tunic with white trim and white slacks, turned as Riki stepped out. “Feel better?”

“Uh...sure.” Riki looked around. “Why are we eating out here?”

Iason moved to the table and Cal immediately held his chair out for him. “I thought it would be nice for us to enjoy our meal here tonight.”

Cal moved to hold Riki’s chair, but after receiving a glare from the mongrel, he stepped back and started to serve the dinner instead.

Riki settled opposite Iason, uneasily. What was this all about? A romantic dinner for two? What was Iason up to? “Is this why you’ve got me in this getup?” he asked, confused.

“I think those clothes look splendid on you, Riki,” Iason countered, knowing that his pet had a closet full of clothes that he never wore unless he was specifically instructed to. Riki favored the black jeans and matching top that he arrived in, either to remind him of his roots or perhaps because he was simply used to having a very limited wardrobe.

“So...why are we eating out here?”

“There is little point in having a balcony and a spectacular view without enjoying it once and awhile, don’t you think?”

Riki shrugged and glanced out at the city, unaware that Iason’s eyes never wavered from him. When he turned back, the intensity of Iason’s gaze worried him. “I don’t want to do it out here.”

“We are just having a meal, pet.” Iason accepted his glass of wine from Cal and nodded in approval of the decorative plate of pasta that was placed before him.

“Then what’s all this for?”

“You did as you promised while our guests were here and this is your reward.”

Riki stared at Iason for a long, hard moment, trying to judge if this was another of the Blondie’s ploys. “Seriously?”

“Indeed.”

Riki was as uncomfortable with rewards as he was punishments; they both made him feel like a worthless object. Cal placed a glass of beer in front of him as well as a plate of pasta. Riki stared at his glass, suspiciously.

“I have no need to drug you anymore, pet, you respond to me easily enough on your own.” Besides, the aphrodisiacs that were manufactured for the breed pets had horrible side effects on a slum mongrel.

Riki flushed with humiliation and shame. Damn it. Even if that were true, he didn't need it said aloud for God's sake!

“There is more cake for desert, Master Riki,” Cal offered kindly. “And ice cream.”

“That will be all, Cal.”

Riki watched the furniture leave and turned back to Iason. “Can I smoke?”

“After our meal, and if you really must, then yes you may.”

That tore it. Something was definitely not right and Riki rose. “This...all of this...why are you doing all of this? It doesn't make any sense.”

“How does it not make sense? We are having dinner on the balcony, not an orgy on the rooftop.”

“Are you...getting rid of me then?”

Iason sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I have already explained why we are eating out here. I don't like repeating myself, Riki.”

Riki shook his head. There was more...there had to be more to it than that. Iason liked things a certain way, always. They had sex, pretty much anywhere, but most times it was in Iason's bedroom. He had his evening cocktail in the parlor while looking through his briefs for the next day. He took calls in his office, he played Pool with Raoul in the games room and they fucking ate in the dining room, God damn it! What had changed?

“But...why? I'm just your pet not your...not...”

Iason scowled and rose, irritated when Riki backed up at his advance. "Not what, Riki?"

Riki flushed turned away to look at the city. He couldn't say it, not to Iason. It wasn't true, so there was no need to say it.

"Not what, Riki?" Iason stepped up behind him, wrapped his arms around his pet. "Not my lover?"

Riki swallowed, even as his knuckles turned white against the tall, stone barrier. "I'm your... pet."

"You are both."

"Iason! This...we...."

This wasn't a normal relationship! The Blondie had kidnapped him, kept him chained and contained for three years. Tortured and tormented him until he was properly conditioned. They weren't lovers or pairing partners. They were a master and a pet. Iason had drilled that into him and he had finally accepted it. Damn it, why was he now changing the rules?

"This was supposed to be a gesture of approval. I had not intended it to upset you."

Iason turned Riki so he could kiss him, watched, as always, the mongrel stared at him or just past him while their lips moved against each other. He deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue inside and Riki, while not exactly reciprocating, didn't offer any protest either. And still, Riki's eyes stayed open. Hell. Every other pet he had ever witnessed closed their eyes while being kissed, unless instructed otherwise. Why wouldn't Riki?

"Do you always kiss with your eyes open, Riki?" he asked smoothly, easily hiding his frustration.

"I don't know."

"Is that how you kissed Guy?"

Where the hell was this coming from? "I thought I wasn't supposed to be thinking about him?"

"You two were pairing partners."

"So?"

"Then what did your relationship with him involve?"

Riki wasn't about to give Iason details of his past life with Guy. He would keep some part of himself, some parts all to himself and away from Iason's manipulations. "What the hell do you think we did?"

Iason reached down and cupped Riki, who pushed against Iason's hand, as his body had been trained to do, and his breath hitched. "Did you touch him here, Riki? Where did he touch you?"

"I don't want to talk about Guy!"

But the jealousy was already swarming inside of Iason as he pulled Riki hard against him and slid his hand inside Riki's trousers. "Did he make you feel like this, Riki? Did you whimper and cry for him, give him those sweet little moans of yours as he fucked you?"

Riki closed his eyes and bit his lip, hard. Iason's voice remained so cold and calm, it caused him to shiver.

"Tell me how he made you feel, Riki?" Iason's free hand slid under Riki's shirt to caress his nipples. "Does he know all your good spots, as I do?"

Riki gasped and moaned and hated himself for it.

"Did you react to his touch as you react to mine?"

"N...no." Riki was panting now.

Guy hadn't tortured him and conditioned him. Guy had been loving and kind and gentle, he was nothing like this sadistic monster that had destroyed him from the inside out. And yet, despite the fact that Iason was a monster,

despite the hatred Riki had for him, he craved the monster's touch; the touch of his master.

“No what, pet? Say it. Say it!”

"No, not...like you." He knew he was giving in to Iason's sick delusions, but he couldn't help it.

"How was it different?" Iason continued to fondle Riki from below as he pressed his body hard against him and rubbed the young man's nipples until they were hard and aching against his fingertips. "Tell me!"

Riki moaned and threw his head back. Who could think when they were being tormented like this? "C...can't," he managed breathlessly.

"You can't? Disobedience will result in punishment, Riki. Is that what you want?"

"You...T...told me not to....uuhhhhhh.....ahhhhh....think of....Guy when you....hmmmmm....were....touching me!"

Iason stopped suddenly and Riki almost suffered a seizure from the lack of stimulation. He opened his eyes and blinked at the Blondie. He desperately wanted it to continue, but he was also glad it had stopped. Using Iason's last order against him seemed to have worked, but now he was in a horrible state of arousal and he wasn't allowed to touch himself to gain release.

"Clever," Iason purred and then led Riki back to the table. "Now, let us sit and eat and enjoy the evening."

Riki sat but he was no longer hungry, his body was craving release and he knew that Iason stopped in the middle of his seduction to punish him for not giving in about Guy. He picked up his fork and pushed his food around on his plate.

“I have to go away for a few days on business.”

Riki stared at his plate and shifted, squeezed his legs together discretely in an attempt to lessen the burning discomfort between them. Of course, no

matter what he did, unless Iason loosened his cock ring relief would escape him.

“It’s not far from here and the facility is quite close to the ocean.” Iason watched Riki trying not to squirm in his seat and calmly ate the food Cal had prepared. “Have you ever seen the ocean, pet?”

Riki glanced up at him, scornfully. “Where the fuck would I ever be to see the ocean?”

Iason pressed his lips together to keep from smiling. Oh yes, Riki’s temper always flared when he was in such a heavy state of arousal, especially when he was being prevented from release. It was quite entertaining really, to see how long his pet would last before begging for it.

“Eat your food, Riki.”

Riki speared a piece of pasta, shoved it in his mouth and chewed reluctantly.

“Would you like to come with me?”

Riki stabbed another noodle. “Come with you where?”

“I just told you that I have to go away on a business trip. Would you like to come with me, get out of here for awhile and see the ocean?”

Riki was raising his fork to his mouth and paused to meet Iason’s gaze. “Leashed?”

“Of course.”

Riki set the fork down without eating the food upon it. “No.”

Iason sighed. “You said you were bored being here all the time.”

“I am.”

“Then come with me.”

“Not on a leash.”

Iason shook his head at his pet's stubbornness. “Very well, I'll make it an order.” No longer hungry himself he pushed away his plate and rose. “I'll have Cal put together a bag for you.”

“I don't want to be carted around on a leash, damn it!” he'd had to endure that for the first few months after he returned to Eos, it was part of the conditions that had been set by the other Blondies in order for Iason to keep him. He had hated it, being led around by Cal, who was just as humiliated as he was to be carting around a man twice his size and age by a collar and chain.

“Do you think I'm idiot?” Iason asked coolly. “If I took you out of Eos for five minutes without a leash you would be gone and it would be an annoyance to have to track you down again.”

“How far would I get with this damn pet ring on?” Riki snarled, reared up and swiped his arm across the table in fury, scattering their plates and glasses. “You're the one always reminding me of it, of how it chains me to you, and where exactly am I supposed to go if I did run? You've taken everything away from me. Everything! I don't have anywhere else to fucking go!”

Iason stared at him and his expression hardened.

“I'm your pet. You've made me that and I can't be anything else but that now. I've accepted that I'm subject to your whims and your desires and there's not a fucking thing I get to have for myself anymore. Isn't that enough? Do you have to continue to fucking humiliate me, too? Do you have to strip me of every shred of fucking...”

Realizing by the dark fury in Iason's eyes that he had gone too far, Riki gasped and turned away to grip the rail, his breathing suddenly ragged. Fuck! Fuck! He hadn't meant to say all of that. He hadn't meant to admit to his complete defeat, not in front of Iason. He hit the concrete barrier of the rail in frustration, barely feeling the pain that shot up his hand from the impact, and so he hit it again and again.

“Stop!” Iason caught Riki’s bleeding fist, spun the trembling mongrel and wrapped his arms around him. Riki tried to push away for only a few seconds then just slumped in defeat, and for some reason that bothered the Blondie even more than Riki’s temper tantrum.

“J...just do whatever you w...want.”

Iason sighed forcibly guided Riki inside and settled the young man on the wide sectional of the front parlor as he called for Cal. “Bring something to tend Riki’s hand, he’s hurt himself.”

Cal hurried off as Iason knelt before his pet and examined the broken skin. “Why must you be so violent?” he asked annoyed, then caught Riki’s chin and forced the mongrel to look at him. “Riki.”

“Habit,” he spat and tried to look away.

"I have told you repeatedly that shame and humiliation are a waste of time for a pet." Iason gripped Riki's chin between firm, white gloved fingers. "You have to let it go. You hold yourself accountable for things that have no meaning here. You only make things more difficult for yourself."

But Riki was ashamed. Every time he gave into Iason's desires. Every time he obeyed an order. Every time he thought of the horrible things he had said to Guy in order to make his friend forget about him. Shame was a part of every human, without shame there was no morality. Without humiliation there was no pride.

"And how can you say that you have nothing? I will buy you anything you want...."

"But it isn't mine, damn it!"

Iason stared at him, puzzled. "Of course it is. Anything I give you is yours, Riki."

"I didn't earn it so it isn't mine! Don't you fucking get that? I can't go where I want, do what I want, be what I want!"

"No," Iason agreed. "You are mine and I will not give you up. However, if there is somewhere you would like to go, or something you would like to do, all you have to do is ask me and I will consider your request."

"I don't want anything from you."

Iason shrugged and move to the opposite side to sit down. "Then, your distress is of your own doing. If you will not ask me for anything, or allow me to properly care for you as my pet, then your complaints are invalid and will no longer be tolerated."

Cal returned with a bowl of water, a cloth and a small hand held medical kit.

"Oh, Master Riki..."

"Stop fucking calling me that!"

Cal flinched and glanced at Iason. The Blondie nodded curtly, and Cal gently cleaned the blood from Riki's hand. "As you like...R...Riki."

The dark head came up so suddenly he almost knocked into the furniture's chin, startling Cal even further. They stared at each other warily, then Riki smirked and looked away again as Cal continued to tend to his hand.

Iason watched them both with a mild amusement as he crossed one long leg over the other. "You haven't answered me, Riki."

Riki glanced at the Blondie. "About what?"

"If you would like to come with me to see the ocean."

Riki chewed on his lip again then hissed when Cal applied antiseptic.

"Sorry," the furniture offered and began to wrap a bandage around Riki's hand.

"Riki."

He looked at Iason again. "Not leashed."

Iason sighed and finally nodded. "Fine, not leashed, but Riki," His icy eyes burned into Riki's. "If you cause me any trouble, I will punish you severely. Then, I will find every one of your friends from the slums and make you watch as I torture them, until there is no blood left inside their bodies. What you went through will be nothing compared to what I do to them. Do you understand?"

Riki swallowed, hard, because he knew Iason's threat was very real. This, at least, was the Iason he knew. The monster that he could somewhat defend against. He preferred this Iason to one who was kind or forgiving; that Iason he didn't know how to handle.

"I won't run."

Iason held his gaze for a long moment. "I am trusting you to mean that, Riki."

"I give you my word."

"Good. And we'll take Cal with us as well."

"To keep an eye on me," Riki muttered.

"To assist us both." He glanced at the furniture. "Cal, prepare a bag for us for about three or four days, yourself included. Make sure there is appropriate swimwear."

Cal nodded and rose, taking away the equipment he had brought in.

"Do you know how to swim, Riki?"

Riki nodded, curtly.

"Really? But you said you had never been to the ocean."

"There were a few watering holes in Ceres, not many. You learn to swim or you get drowned, that's just the way it is there."

"You had a very hard life there, didn't you?"

“It was what it was.”

“And despite all that hardship, you find it more difficult to live here, in the lap of luxury. I am unable to understand why.”

“It’s your lap isn’t it? No matter what you say, none of this is mine. I didn’t earn it or fight for it. I got swallowed up by it and so I’m just like everything else in here, an object for you to amuse yourself with.”

“Riki, you are far more than that.”

“A pet is nothing.”

Iason couldn’t hide his frustration any longer and huffed. “You are making it far worse than it is.”

“Yeah?” Riki countered. “Then why don’t you become my pet, Iason? See how much you enjoy it? See how much fun it is to be fucked and gawked at by someone you didn’t get to chose, or live with the fact that at any moment you could be sold to a brothel or have your mind wiped and be some pervert’s sex doll.”

“I told you, you are mine, Riki. I would never sell you.”

Riki looked away and examined the hand that Cal had wrapped.

Iason rose and settled next to Riki. “Do you truly believe that I would do that after all the trouble I’ve gone through to make you my pet?” Iason cupped Riki’s chin once again. “You are mine, Riki. I will never, ever let you go.”

Riki was silent.

“It is my job to provide for you, Riki. Money, food, clothes and entertainment, you only have to tell me what it is you want.”

“I want to be free.”

“Why do you consistently ask for the one thing I cannot give you?”

“You could give it to me. Why is it so hard to just let me go?” Riki turned to face Iason, tried not to think of how beautiful the Blondie was with his long, pale hair spilling across his shoulders. “You could get another pet, a younger pet like Aleia who...”

Iason gripped Riki’s chin, harder. “I do not wish to have another pet. I want only you, Riki!”

“Why? Why does it have to be me? I’m no one, Iason, I...” Riki’s words were cut off as Iason’s lips descended in a firm, almost brutal kiss.

“No, Riki.” The Blondie’s voice was soft, despite the anger in his kiss as he pushed Riki back against the cushions. “It is they who are nothing. Other pets mean nothing to me, they are all the same. They do not feel conflict or rage, they have no concept of fighting against their masters.”

“You...you want me because I fight with you?” But he didn’t always fight, in fact since he had returned he’d been ridiculously obedient to Iason’s whims. Iason’s words made no sense because the Blondie was always on him about being submissive, of playing the part of his pet.

“Not that kind of fight, Riki.” Iason gripped both of Riki’s wrists and held them over his head, then his other hand slid over Riki’s chest, pinched his nipple. “You fight yourself, you fight the desire that I can create in you, and when you finally give into it, that is my reward.”

Riki’s eyes widened then fluttered closed as Iason manipulated his body to create a utopia of sensations. “I...I don’t understand. H...How...” He winced then gasped as Iason freed him from the confines of his trousers. “O...other p...pets do...this....they...submit.”

“No, Riki. They are weak and pliable, passive and tiresome. They do not show the intensity you do. They do not have pride, Riki, not like you. With you I can tell everything you are feeling by the way you react to me, the way your eyes flash and your lip trembles. I can see the way your mind resists me even as your body arches towards mine. I see things in you that no other pet has ever shown me.”

“I...n...no, I...that isn’t...” Riki wet his lips and squeezed his eyes shut as Iason fondled him. He didn’t understand what Iason was saying, couldn’t

comprehend the opposing views that the Blondie was suggesting. It made no sense. No sense! "Ahhhh! Ohhh...I...can't...wait..."

Iason had pulled Riki's trousers down and slid a finger inside of him. "This is why I need you, Riki. Even now you are trying to find reason, while your body presses into mine, craves mine with such wanton need. It excites me, Riki. You excite me beyond measure."

Riki's eyes widened as his trousers were swiftly removed and he was pulled onto Iason's lap. He cried out as Iason thrust inside of him and gripped the Blondie's shoulders for some semblance of balance and, perhaps, even comfort.

"This is what you do to me, Riki," Iason stated as he gripped Riki's hips, moving him up and down over him with sheer strength and watching the Mongrel's face explode in a mixture of pain and pleasure. "Only you can shatter my will, destroy my focus and make me desire you so badly."

Riki was lost. Iason's words were mere whispers in his ears now as his body responded to his master's whims. There was pain, that distinct level of pain that bordered on pleasure, only Iason could make him feel this, only Iason and Riki hated the Blondie for that. He was caught in a web of his own making, doomed to be a Blondie's pet, to be fucked and fondled and treated like an animal at the whim of an android; and yet he didn't care. At this moment, he didn't care at all, because he never wanted this feeling to end.

When it was over, almost an hour and a half later, Riki lay on the sofa exhausted, sore and once again, ashamed. Iason had gone into his office to work, and Riki had managed to get his trousers back on at least. He wanted a cigarette, but he was still too shaky to rise to his feet.

Instead he lay on his back and stared up at the vaulted ceiling of the condo. This was his cage, this was his hell and there was nothing he could do about it. Iason hadn't punished him in a while, not since the after party he'd been forced to attend when he first got back, and that really hadn't been a punishment it was just Iason out of control.

Maybe Iason was right. He needed to try and let go of the things from his past and truly accept that this was his life now, but how could he? If he did

that he would be forever lost. He really would be the lowest form of shit. But what was all that nonsense about Iason wanted him because of his fight and his pride? It made no sense. If he stopped fighting completely, became docile like the other pets, would Iason sell him?

Despite the hell he was in living here, he did not want to be sold to a brothel in Midas. He did understand that there were worse things that could happen to him, and that fear was really the only thing that kept his temper in check, most of the time. But he wasn't a doll or a dog or anything like that, he was a person. Why couldn't Iason understand that the same things that evidently drew the Blondie towards him, were the things that made it impossible for Riki to be happy here?

"Riki?"

Riki opened his eyes and looked up at Cal, who had his hands full with the supper dishes, which reminded Riki that he had scattered the plates and ruined their meal. "Sorry."

Cal shook his head. "Would you like a blanket?"

"No." Riki sighed heavily, sat up and winced. "I'm going for a smoke."

"I've put them out on the table outside for you."

Riki stared at Cal for a long moment. "You really do take good care of me, kid." Riki rose slowly. "Thanks for that."

Cal flushed and watched the young man limp towards the balcony. Perhaps a few days at the beach would make the mongrel feel better. Cal had never seen the ocean either, but he was trying not to get excited about it. Furniture was supposed to smother all emotion, and he had done so successfully for many years; until he met Riki the Dark. Riki, who showed such intense emotions all the time that it was difficult not to be affected by it.

However, he knew of what happened to his predecessor after becoming too close to the slum mongrel, and Cal had no desire to repeat that mistake.

Still, every now and then Riki said something that made him feel good. He would never show it, never give into it, but it was there; all the same.

Before Riki returned his new master had been cold, hard and brutal. Cal had been incredibly afraid of Iason Mink, most furniture was simply by reputation, yet to work the Blondie was also something many furniture aspired to.

Within the first week working for Iason, Cal had been punished for allowing a glass to slip from his hands in his master's presence, and shattering on the floor. It was the dark mood of his master that had made Cal so nervous, but that could not be used as an excuse. Iason had beaten him severely and he had ended up in the medical wing. Cal had never been so afraid before, and he had expected that he would be expunged or left to die, or worse; there was always a worse for furniture. Instead, his injuries had been healed and Iason took him back into the condo, advising that Cal would continue to work for him, now that he understood what it would mean if he made another mistake.

Did Riki know how monstrous the master could be? Possibly, yet Cal suspected even the slum mongrel had not experienced the full extent of Iason's anger. If he had, he would not annoy or fight against Iason so often. Riki had broken several dishes, but Iason had not beaten him. Still, Cal supposed there were worse punishments than beatings and watching Riki walk away just now with such a limited gait, it was obvious that the mongrel had received a sort of punishment for his behavior.

With a small sigh, he wandered to the kitchen to discard broken dishes.

Chapter 8

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason takes Riki to the ocean

Iason entered the large beach cottage and handed Cal his cloak. He'd had a long day at the facility, but finally had managed to get all of his work done so he could come back and spend all of tomorrow with Riki. The weather was soft and warm and his pet had managed to turn even darker in the sun.

"Where is he?"

"In the water." Cal replied.

Riki had spent most of their first day there inside the cottage, while Iason was at work, but by the second day, the mongrel had finally swallowed his pride and went for a walk on the private beach. At first he simply sat out there and smoked, but eventually, either by the draw of the water or the heat of the day, he had stripped off his clothes and gone swimming. He had not returned inside until just before Iason arrived home, so that, after taking a shower and dressing in his usual black outfit, Riki was seated in the living area when the master arrived; as if he had been there the entire day.

Today, Riki had done the same thing, gone for a walk, then sat on the sandy beach and smoked three cigarettes, before diving into cool, clear water. He'd worn the swimming trunks that Cal had packed for him this time and accepted the towel, food and drink that Cal had brought out to him at lunch time. Riki had even tried to encourage the furniture to swim with him, but Cal declined.

Now, Iason had returned early and Riki was still swimming. Of course, Cal had given Iason a full report on Riki's activities last night, and he was sure Riki realized that would be done. Still, it seemed that the mongrel was trying to hide the fact that he was enjoying himself from their master.

"Delay dinner for about an hour," Iason ordered as he stepped out through the veranda doors and headed down towards the beach. He could see Riki's lean, muscular form cutting through the water with an impressive stride, saw the moment his pet noticed him, chuckled at the mongrel's obvious but muted curse, and then watched Riki slowly make his way back to shore.

As Iason watched Riki emerge from the waves, his hard body tanned darker by the sun and glistening with moisture, the Blondie had the urge to take him right there. Never had he seen anything more beautiful than what he was looking at in that very moment.

"You're back early," Riki grumbled.

Iason watched as his pet slicked the wet hair from his face with both hands, leaning his body back to try and ring some of the water from his dark locks in a pose that Iason found incredibly sublime, then strode onto the sand and bent to scoop up the towel that Cal had left for him.

"Yes."

Did Riki truly not know how beautiful he was? Iason watched his pet dab the moisture from his skin then toss the towel over his head and vigorously dry his hair. He immediately stepped up to take over and Riki let his hands drop.

"Your hair is getting long."

"I know. I need to cut it."

"Why?"

"I don't like it this long."

"I'll have Cal do it for you, then."

Riki shrugged as Iason continued to towel dry his hair, taking his time and separating sections to dry as if he was examining the quality or color. Riki wanted to move away but knew that would only piss off the Blondie.

Finally Iason settled the towel around Riki's shoulders and pulled him into an embrace. "You're cold."

"Water is cold, but you get used to it." Iason finally pulled back and Riki, who's arms remained at his sides during their embrace, stared up into those icy blue eyes. "So, when do we go back?"

"Tomorrow evening, unless you would like to stay here longer?"

Riki would like to stay here forever. This place was so far removed from Tanagura or Ceres that it was like they were on another planet. The air had such a clean scent to it, and the sound of the waves at night practically lulled him to sleep. The water here felt far different than the murky mud holes in Ceres; it felt like the ocean was cleansing away all his shame and dirt and just leaving him content and bare and pure.

He felt free here, or at least more so than when he was in Eos. He could go for a walk, within reason anyway, and spend the day smoking if he wanted. He wasn't looking at the same four walls all the time, or being assaulted by the lights and sounds of the city. He'd spotted a few species of fish, which had been a secret thrill, fed a few of the sea-birds whenever they landed and even found some sea shells on the beach. This was heaven compared to what he was used to. Of course, he would never admit any of that to Iason.

Instead, he shrugged and said, "Whatever."

Iason's other hand cupped around Riki's neck and pulled him in for a kiss. Even Riki's lips were cold, and for some reason that enticed Iason. He inhaled the sweet scent of the ocean from his pet's skin, felt himself grow even more aroused. He licked the moisture from Riki's neck, then his shoulders and was rewarded with the soft, gentle pants of the mongrel in his arms.

"Are you...gonna swim?" Riki murmured and wet his lips as Iason's fingers pinched his nipples.

"No, pet." Iason's hand lowered and slid inside of Riki's small bathing trunks to caress his ass. "But I did enjoy watching you swim."

"I...can go back in if you like it that much."

"No," Iason smirked at his pet's subtle attempt to flee. "It's getting late and the water is too cold."

Riki's eyes roamed up towards the beach house they were renting and flinched slightly as Iason's finger slid inside of him. "Shouldn't we....go back?"

Iason lifted his head to stare down at Riki. "Do you want to?"

Riki lowered his eyes, bit his lip as his body arched against Iason and his fingers gripped the white sleeves of his master's tunic by sheer reflex. Damn it. "Yes."

Iason smiled and cocked his foot against Riki's legs, causing the mongrel to topple onto his back into the sand. "A shame."

The sand was impressively soft against Riki's skin, somewhat irritating when it got into the crevices of his body, but overall it was a unique experience. Iason was slow and impossibly gentle and Riki could not even think about hiding his desire this time.

He felt a strange feeling well up inside of him and he didn't know what that feeling meant. Sex with Iason was often brutal or harsh, and almost always it relied on some form of torment. But this, this was different. This was almost as comforting as the sex he'd had with Guy, but on a much higher level because of how Iason could make him respond. It was sweet and tender one moment, then intense and urgent the next.

Afterwards, Riki lay straddled atop Iason, trying to catch his breath, as usual, but he didn't feel the sheer exhaustion that usually came with such acts. He wasn't even sore really, unless you count where some of the sand crawled up his ass. This had been a new experience, and it was as if Iason was testing the waters to see how he would react to such a change.

Iason didn't have to ask if Riki enjoyed their session, his pet's responses were more than adequate to say that he had, and Iason himself had

thoroughly enjoyed it. It had been difficult holding back, but he managed to extract some new reactions from his pet that absolutely thrilled him. And for once, Riki wasn't immediately trying to move away from him after sex, he was letting Iason hold him.

"Are you hungry, pet?" Iason asked as he nibbled on Riki's ear, it was right there after all so how could he resist?

"Yeah." Riki pushed himself up, wobbled for a moment, then started back towards the water.

"Where are you going?"

"I've got sand up my ass!"

Iason laughed and watched the beautiful young man dive into the sea again. Iason had been the smart one and had only exposed one part of himself to Riki and none of himself to the beach. He rose, adjusted his clothing and marvelled at his pet's strength and endurance. Iason momentarily wished he could swim, so he could join Riki in the water, but his android body was simply too heavy.

"Riki, come in now. That water is too cold."

"It's fine...."

"Riki."

Riki rolled his eyes but returned to shore, picked up his swim trunks and wrapped the towel around his waist. "It's really not that cold..."

"Come inside and take a hot shower." Iason insisted as they started towards the house. "You can swim again tomorrow."

Once inside, Cal appeared with more towels, but Riki just headed straight for the washroom and Iason followed. They entered the shower together and Riki glared at the Blondie.

"Really?" he demanded as Iason poured some soap into his hands. "I can wash myself."

"We want to make sure all the sand is out, pet."

"I already got...." He yelped as Iason's hand went up the crack of his ass. "Shit, come on!" Give a guy some warning he thought, and then simply gave up his protests because he knew it was useless to argue.

Iason chuckled and picked up the small tube of shampoo.

"I can wash my own damn hair!"

"Be quiet and turn around."

"You're not washing my hair!"

"Okay." Iason handed Riki the tube and turned his back. "Wash mine then."

Riki was momentarily too stunned to respond. Seriously? Iason's hair was so long and sleek and, well, fabulous really that Riki was almost afraid to touch it most times.

"I'm waiting, Riki."

Riki poured a generous amount of shampoo into his palm, because Iason had a hell of a lot of hair, then gingerly started to work it through the end of the Blondie's hair. Holy shit, was it soft! Like spun silk running through his fingers! His hands shook a little as he added more shampoo and worked it higher through Iason's hair, then repeated until he had worked the shampoo all the way through the pale hair.

Iason tilted his head back so that Riki could shampoo the top of his head and enjoyed the feel of Riki's fingers massaging the soap into his scalp. "That feels wonderful, pet."

"I...I think I got it all through," Riki murmured, appalled that he had become highly aroused by this point, with his fingers in Iason's hair and the warm jets of the spray hitting his back and sides.

"Excellent." Iason turned and Riki moved aside so the taller man could rinse his hair.

Watching the water cascading over the elite's pale, perfect body sent shivers of heat through Riki and he hated himself for it. He grabbed the shampoo and quickly scrubbed his own hair then dipped his head under the spray.

Iason then thoroughly washed all of Riki's body and, because it was Iason and Riki was trained to become aroused at the Blondie's touch, Iason took him for a second time. This time it was closer to what Riki was used to, though still not as harsh as it often was. Since Riki had already been allowed to come on the beach, he was now almost in agony because Iason had yet to loosen his pet ring again.

"P...please," he begged, his hands splayed against the tiles of the shower as Iason continued to ram into him. His cock was twitching and throbbing painfully, pleading for release. "The ring...Iason... please...enough."

"Not yet," Iason refused as his hands moved around to fondle Riki's hard member, making the agony even worse. "It's not enough."

It would never be enough, Iason thought as he buried himself over and over inside the mongrel's sweet, tight body. Only Riki could make him feel like this. Only Riki held such power over him. Raoul was right, it was insane that a Blondie of his caliber could so easily be reduced to a lust starved, rutting beast, simply by a slum mongrel.

Riki could no longer restrain himself and started to cry out and moan with pain, pleasure and need. His legs quivered and shook, and Iason's arm slid around his waist to prevent him from falling, which caused the Blondie to drive even deeper into him.

"Ahhhh!! God! P...please!"

When Riki felt Iason's fingers in his hair, pulling his head back so that he could ravage his throat, he was sure he would pass out from the sensations rocking through him, but Iason's rhythm never changed inside of him.

"Do you want to come, pet?"

"Y...Y...Yes! Yes!"

"Did you enjoy your time on the beach and in the water?"

Fuck! The bastard was going to make him say it. "Y...yes."

"Are you glad you came with me?"

A single tear slipped from the corner of Riki's left eye. "P...please..."

"Are you glad you are here, Riki?"

"Yes! Fuck, yes, now please let me come!"

Iason's hand slid from his hair down to the ring, gave it a gentle twist. "All you had to do was ask, pet."

His release was almost instantaneous, his joyful cry echoed off the tiles around them even as he felt Iason tense inside of him. His body collapsed immediately afterwards, but, as always, Iason caught him.

Riki didn't have the energy to resist as Iason rinsed them both off, then picked him up in his arms and walked into the master bedroom, where he gently deposited Riki on the bed and slid down next to him.

"Bastard," Riki gasped "T...tricked me."

"It seems I have to," Iason murmured as he idly caressed Riki's hair. "You are so stubborn, pet."

"Fuck off."

Iason smiled, caught Riki's face and turned it towards him so he could capture Riki's mouth. "Unfortunately for you, I am not completely satisfied yet."

Riki moaned in defeat as Iason's fingers worked their magic on him once again.

They ate dinner on the patio, to the sound of the waves and the call of sea

birds. Riki wore shorts and a tank top, while Iason remained in his usual slacks and tunic.

"I can't get Cal to come swimming with me."

Iason glanced at Riki over the rim of his wine glass. "Oh? Do you need him to?"

"No, I just thought he might like to try it, since he's here, but I guess he doesn't think he's supposed to."

Iason smiled. "Shall I tell him to go swimming with you?"

"No. I mean...No." He didn't want to pressure the kid or anything, he just thought Cal could use a bit of fun. He didn't want Iason to order Cal to do something in case he really just didn't want to swim. "Never mind."

Cal appeared to refill Iason's wine glass.

"Do you know how to swim, Cal?" Iason asked.

The furniture blinked. "No, Master."

"Would you like to learn how?"

"If you deem it so, Master."

"Riki, can you teach Cal to swim?"

Riki glared at him. Why didn't Iason ever listen or think about the way he said things to people? "If you want to learn I can try, Cal."

"Whatever you would like, Mas...Riki," the furniture amended and hoped his excitement wasn't showing.

He had always wanted to learn to swim, but the needs and desires of a furniture depended its master, so he could never simply accept such a thing without being instructed to. He had spent much time over the past two days watching Riki swim, and even envying him a little.

"It's settled then." Iason ate a bite of food. He didn't really need to eat, none of his kind did, but he enjoyed the tastes and textures of food and so he kept up with the tradition. Besides, it gave him something else to share with his pet. "Tomorrow we shall go shopping in the morning, and then perhaps the casino's in the afternoon. You like to gamble don't you Riki?"

Riki shrugged. He used to play cards whenever he could sneak into a casino in Midas, was pretty good at it, but it had been a long time since he'd had the chance for it. Besides he'd have to use Iason's money and he didn't want to do that. "Do they allow pets in the casinos?"

"Here they do, yes. Money is money after all." Iason watched Riki over the rim of his wine glass. "What is it, pet?"

"Nothing."

"I will give you money for the games."

"It's no fun if you can't earn your own winnings."

"Very well, I will give you some start up funds and anything you win over that will be yours."

Riki blinked at him. "That's not what I mean. That is still your money, Iason."

"Several professional gamblers start with an investor, Riki. My money is what you will use to get into the games, but anything you win is yours. That is fair, isn't it?"

Riki considered it. He'd like to have some of his own pocket money, just to say he had some. "And if I lose?"

"Well, then you'll have to pay me back, of course, with interest."

Riki had no doubt how he would be paying Iason back, but still. The idea was tempting. "I...I have to teach Cal to swim tomorrow." Plus he wanted some more time in the water as well.

"Then we'll go to the casinos in the evening and have supper out. You can go swimming when we return from shopping."

"Why do we have to go shopping?"

"To buy things, of course."

Riki rolled his eyes. "Why don't you just send Cal out for whatever you want?"

"I don't know what I want, that is why they call it shopping." Iason set his glass down and reached across the table to place his hand over Riki's. "I want to buy you something, Riki." He let his fingers linger over the bracelet on the young man's wrist, which Riki was still willingly wearing. "You liked this, didn't you?"

"Yeah, but...I don't need anything else..."

"If you do this for me, if you let me buy you something, something you really want, then we can stay here another two days and you can swim to your heart's content."

Riki debated the offer. He really didn't want to go back to Eos, but he felt weird accepting gifts from Iason. He didn't enjoy being a pet, and he hated being 'provided' for like a child. It was bad enough that he had no control over how the Blondie used his body, but accepting gifts on top of it made him feel like even more of a whore. Riki didn't know how to properly explain his reasons for refusing to Iason without the man getting pissed off at him.

"I guess we go back tomorrow then."

Iason stared at him for a long moment, then straightened and rose. "We'll leave in the morning then."

Wait! What happened to staying until the evening, Riki thought as he watched Iason head inside. "Shit." He stared down at his food and dropped

his fork, then glanced at Cal who retained his usual neutral expression. “Sorry.”

“You mustn’t apologize to me, Master Riki. I am only furniture. Would you like desert?”

Cal’s monotone politeness made him feel even worse and he was back to calling him Master again. “Didn’t you want to learn to swim?”

“A furniture has no wants or desires.”

Shit. Shit! “Fuck it!” Riki pushed his chair back and rose. He stormed into the beach house and found Iason in the front room, reading as if nothing had happened. “Fine!”

The Blondie glanced up at him with a cold, impassive expression. “Did you want something?”

Riki’s hands curled into fists as his sides. “I...”

God! Why was this so hard? His heart was beating furiously in his chest and he felt sick to his stomach. Was it just because it made him feel weak in front of Iason? He was weak, he had no choice in anything and it wasn’t fair for Iason to suddenly give him one now. What was he expecting, Riki wondered? He wasn’t like the other pets. He didn’t care about baubles or clothes or any of that shit the other masters bought for their pets.

Iason continued to regard him coolly.

“I...want to...stay,” he muttered finally and averted his gaze.

“I didn’t hear you.”

Mother fucker, son of a bitching whore in heat! Riki forced himself to meet the other man’s eyes. “I want to stay!”

Iason felt a tingle surge inside of his brain at the furious, flashing sparkle in the mongrel’s dark eyes. He set his book aside and rose, slowly, deliberately to walk over to his pet. “You agree to the terms?” he reminded darkly,

catching Riki's chin, and at the young man's curt nod he smiled. "Why was that so difficult for you?"

Riki jerked away and stumbled back, averting his eyes once again. "You wouldn't understand."

"No, I suppose not." Iason settled back on the sofa, picked up his book and patted his lap. "Come sit, pet."

Riki ground his teeth together and settled on the Blondie's lap, felt Iason's arm curl around his waist and his fingers slide up inside Riki's shirt. It was a feather light caress against his ribcage, not meant to arouse simply a soothing glide of skin on skin, a type of idle petting.

Every now and then, Iason would hum or nod and Riki would turn the page in the book for him. Iason's computer brain could scan the pages within a second, yet he had developed a habit to leisurely read through each word instead. Sometimes, perhaps from actual interest or simply the restlessness of sitting on his lap, the words on the paper would capture Riki's attention as well, and Iason would deliberately wait to give the signal to turn the page so his pet could finish reading, as he was doing now.

When he felt Riki's head begin to droop against his shoulder he knew his pet was starting to nod off, no doubt from a full day outside in the sun. He closed the book as Cal appeared.

"Do you require anything else tonight?" the furniture asked quietly, seeing the sleeping man draped over his master. "Shall I arrange transportation back to Eos for tomorrow morning?"

"No. We'll be staying a couple more days."

"Shall I undress, Master Riki for you and put him to bed?"

"No, I'll do it. You may retire for the evening."

Cal nodded and headed off to his room.

Iason gathered Riki in his arms and carefully rose, smiling again when the young man didn't move a muscle. "Out like a light," he murmured as he walked to the back of the beach house, where the master bedroom was and carefully settled Riki on the bed.

He removed his clothing first, then carefully pulled off Riki's shorts and top. The mongrel moaned in his sleep as Iason pulled the tank top over his head, then slid his cheek against Iason's bare chest, still mostly asleep. Iason felt a stirring inside of him that he didn't quite understand and gently kissed the dark head of hair beneath his chin.

He slid Riki between the sheets then climbed in next to him and pulled the mongrel against him, knowing that he would not shut down for the night. Instead, he would watch Riki sleep and enjoy the soft vulnerability that only appeared when his pet was completely unconscious or unguarded.

Chapter 9

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason takes Riki to a casino and he meets someone he didn't expect.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you so, so much to everyone who left comments and kudos on this story. It means a lot that you are enjoying it!!

Iason sat at a corner table in the busy casino sharing a drink with a short brown haired man, the club's owner. As an elite he was used to being fussed over, and had not been in the mood for it today, so he had come to this club as he knew the owner Marjan to be less discriminatory and more casual regarding both Blondies and pets.

"He seems to be doing well," the man commented as the waitress set another two drinks in front of them. "Did you teach him how to play?"

Iason's gloved fingers ran over the rim of his glass as his eyes pierced through the small crowds gathered at the different card and dice tables and settled on the one where Riki was playing Dabou; a card game that required a good deal of cunning, skill and bluffing to win against four other players.

"No. It seems he already had that skill before he came to me."

"He's quite old, for a pet, isn't he?"

Iason nodded. "I spent a good deal of time training him; it would be a waste to just throw him away."

Marjan chuckled. "Well, if you ever tire of him, send him my way. He would make a good dealer for the house."

"Do you have many pets working here?"

“A few, it’s difficult to find ones with any common sense, but there are times I come across a pet with good social skills or a head for numbers, so I grab them up. They work far more cheaply than regular workers.”

Iason’s eyebrows rose. “You pay them?” That was unusual, usually when pets were sold to owners for establishments they were slave labor. Their shelter and food was provided for but little else.

“Not what I pay regular employees, of course, as I provide other things for them,” Marjan advised taking a sip of his drink. “But, I find that pets work even harder when they are earning a little for themselves. They promote my place to other pets, both for play and for employment, and they are far more inclined to offer exceptional service.”

“Should they not be doing that anyway, as pets it is their duty to make their master’s happy?”

“Perhaps, but I find that most people, even pets, who take pride in their work are much better than those that are simply forced to do as they are told. They do things because they want to, not just because they have to, and they become happier and more reliable workers.”

“Interesting.”

Marjan smiled. “It gives them a sense of accomplishment and solidifies their loyalty to me. Everyone needs to feel useful, or like they are somehow contributing to their own lives. Even pets. A happy worker is a good worker.”

“Hmmm. I see.” Iason turned his attention back to Riki as he digested Marjan’s words carefully.

Was that why Riki was so restless? Why did he never want to accept any gifts or money? Was he robbing his pet of his pride and his sense of self, piece by piece, by leaving him nothing for him to accomplish for himself? A Master’s responsibility was to provide for the needs of his pet, yet Riki rebelled against this process.

Were the things he enjoyed most about Riki, his fire, pride and stubbornness, inherent in all slum mongrels? Did they all have such a strong sense of self, not because things had been given to them, but because they had been denied so much? Surely not, Iason had met more than his share of useless slum mongrels, but perhaps there was a small percentage of them that were like his Riki.

He had always thought Riki's loathing at being taken care of and his multiple attempts for self-sufficiency of any kind were due only to his stubbornness of not being taken for a pet. It was just arrogance and perhaps a touch of fear that kept him from completely giving into the idea of having a Master.

Now, after hearing Marjan's words he considered that Riki's reactions may not be stubborn rebellion based on fear and loathing, but on need. Did Riki need to feel useful as well? Was being a pet not enough to stimulate him? Did a pet even need stimulation beyond the bedroom, shopping or reading? Of course, most pets didn't read beyond a very basic level; Riki was the exception.

Riki had skills that other pets did not, because he had not been bred as a pet but born a free man. He was highly intelligent, despite his consistent use of vulgar language, and he had exceptional instincts. Riki did not take anyone at face value and gave his respect to no one that he felt did not deserve it. He was a mere slum mongrel before, and now a pet, which was considered a step above slum mongrel in Tanagura; and yet Riki bowed to no one.

Iason sipped his drink, thoughtfully. Riki was conditioned and trained to obey him, to respond to him, but even now, four years later, despite all that he had done to make Riki his pet, the mongrel still fought back against certain things, and still withheld significant pieces of himself. Riki still did not fully belong to him and that was annoying.

As he studied his pet's expression across the room, he saw that Riki's face remained hard and impassive, as if he was actually bored with his surroundings, yet he could see that Riki was winning most of the rounds. He was not showing his excitement or his disappointment as the other players were, making it extremely difficult for the players to read him.

Riki was indeed, very good at the game, still, Iason wouldn't have minded if Riki allowed a smile to slip out now and then, or perhaps a laugh. He had never seen or heard either from his pet and it was disappointing. He kept trying of course, but had no luck so far.

The mongrel wore a black and red leather jacket that Iason had purchased for him earlier that day, Riki having kept his word and swallowed his pride by picking out the gift after only two shops. But Iason suspected his pet would enjoy the jacket, his black one was getting worn.

After shopping they had returned home for lunch, then Iason had sat on the patio of the beach house and watched while Riki taught Cal to swim. The mongrel was surprisingly patient and he'd even managed to get a small smile out of the furniture. In the end though, Cal simply could not relax enough to swim on his own, so they'd gone searching the beach for shells or any strange water creatures.

Riki played his last hand then grabbed his stack of chip discs and walked over to where Iason sat. He was incredibly pleased with himself because he had tripled Iason's starter money, making more than enough interest for the Blondie's investment, and had made a considerable chunk for himself as well. It felt amazing to play again, to have something of his own that was outside of what Iason gave him. Part of him wanted to send half of it to Guy, but he knew that would just open up old wounds and lead to trouble.

Stopping at Iason's table he set the box of chips down, as pets required a master or casino worker to cash them out, and watched the Blondie smile up at him.

"Oh, well done, pet!" Iason's gloved finger ran over the edge of the discs, calculating the amount. "I think I shall have to bring you here more often, rather than use the investments my broker suggests. I'd make far more money."

Riki felt a wave of pleasure envelope him at Iason's praise, then frowned at why it should mean so much. He hid his confusion behind his usual, biting sarcasm. "Yeah, because you really need more money."

Marjan laughed at that. "You know your master very well, my young man." He picked up the box. "I'll get these cashed for you."

Riki nodded and then was pulled down onto Iason's lap as long, familiar fingers threading through his hair.

Iason picked up his drink. "Did you want to try another game, pet?"

Riki shook his head. "I'm not really familiar with the other ones." He sniffed at the liquid in the glass. "What is that?"

"Omardin whiskey. Would you like a taste?"

Riki opened his mouth obediently as Iason held the glass to his lips, ignoring the tinge of embarrassment that the stupid Blondie couldn't just hand him the damn glass so he could drink himself. The minute the liquid hit his throat he started coughing. It burned all the way down and made his eyes water horribly.

"Holy shit!" he gasped. "Tastes like shuttle fuel!"

Iason chuckled and finished off the drink. "You've sampled some strange things in Ceres, pet."

Riki recovered. "How can you drink that? What's it, like, a special oil for androids to lubricate your insides or something?"

Iason's eyes darkened. "Careful, or I shall take you over my knee." He didn't mind Riki's comments most of the time, but he would not allow any form of disrespect.

"Sorry."

Seeing Riki was truly repentant, Iason nodded. "Shall we go back then, since you do not want to play further?"

"Yeah, but I gotta piss first."

"Riki!"

Riki hopped up before Iason could swat him and was already headed for the wash area.

Iason smirked, shook his head as he watched Riki disappear behind the half wall that separated the men's and women's washrooms from the main floor of the casino. There was a lightness to his pet now, having played a game and won some money. Yes, indeed. Perhaps there was something to Marjan's philosophy after all.

“Riki?”

Riki turned towards the quiet, feminine voice and had to catch the back wall to steady himself. “M...Mimea?”

“Oh Riki!” She dropped her empty drink tray and rushed into his arms. “I’m so glad you’re okay! Are you working here too now?”

Mimea! Riki couldn’t believe she was standing right in front of him. He’d had horrific nightmares of what had been done to her, had heard that Raoul had sold her to a brothel in Midas, or one of those places. How could she be here? He firmly kept his arms at his sides and glanced at the barrier that hid them from the rest of the room.

“W...what are you doing here?”

“Master Marjan bought me from a brothel, he said I had people skills. I’ve been working for him for a little over two years now.” She held on tighter. “I was so worried about you. I know you couldn’t say anything back then, I know how afraid you were of Master Mink, but now you’re free and we can...”

A cold sweat trickled down Riki’s spine as he firmly gripped her arms and pushed her back. “I...I’m not free, Mimea. I’m still Iason Mink’s pet.” She blinked at him, confused. “But...I heard you escaped. And...and you’re too old to be a pet now. He couldn’t have kept you, he couldn’t!”

She moved towards him again, distressed and Riki stepped back. “Riki, what is it? Aren’t you happy to see me?”

“I...I’m glad you...you’re doing okay, Mimea, really I am, and I’m sorry about before, about not speaking up. I should have and it...it still haunts me, but...” His eyes continued to flicker towards the entrance of the wash areas. “He’s here. He’s here with me and I...You can’t let him see you, especially not with me! I don’t know what he’ll do. Mimea, please you have to go!”

“He can’t do anything to me now, I work for Marjan and I want to talk with you, Riki.” She reached for him and he slapped her hand away. She gasped and tears welled up in her eyes. “Riki!”

“I...I’m so sorry, Mimea.” He really had loved her once, or at least thought he had, but he had to get away from her before Iason saw them together. “Please, you can’t be here with me. You can’t talk to me, you can’t even look at me. Iason will kill me, he’ll kill us both! I...I don’t really care what he does to me anymore, but you....I can’t have that on my conscience again. I couldn’t bear it.”

“Oh, Riki. What has he done to you?”

“Please, just go, hide in kitchen or an office, something. Please, Mimea!”

Mimea, tears spilling down her cheeks slowly picked up her discarded tray. “I’m sorry, Riki.” She threw herself at him suddenly, pressed her lips to his. “Good bye.”

Riki responded to the kiss before he could stop himself, and then she was gone, hurrying away in the other direction. Nausea spilled into his gut as he stumbled through the door of the men’s room. He just made it into a stall before he started to vomit. All of the visions and feelings of the past rose up and spewed out one after the other until he was on his knees before the toilet and shivering from pain, exertion and fear.

God! What would have happened if Iason had seen them? It was too terrifying to consider.

Slowly rising on legs that threatened to give at any moment he made his way to the sinks, rinsed his mouth and splashed water on his face. As he wiped his arm across his forehead he caught a whiff of something sweet. Perfume? Shit! Shit! Frantic, he stripped off his jacket and shirt, grabbed

some paper towels, poured soap and water on them and attempted to wash away any lingering scent.

He used more towels to dry, but when he put his damp shirt back on he could still smell it. It was faint, but it was there and Iason would notice it in a heartbeat. Shit! Fucking, shit! What was he going to do?

“Riki?”

He stiffened as the cold, familiar voice of his master called to him and he slowly turned, gripping the sink for support.

“What’s wrong, pet? You look flushed.”

“I...I was sick. I think....something I ate.” His eyes remained on the floor, sure that if he raised them Iason would see his guilt. “I think...I’d like to go back and...and lie down, maybe.”

“Yes, of course.” Iason stepped towards him, but Riki brushed past him out of the washroom. Iason scowled, bent to retrieve the jacket that Riki had left on the floor and followed his pet out.

Riki curled up as far away from Iason in the passenger side of the car as possible, his jacket lay between them on the seat and Iason observed him quietly. Riki’s heart threatened to burst from his chest, the blood sounded in his ears like a wild tribal drumming and he wondered if Iason could hear his fear.

“Would you like me to take you to a medical center, Riki?”

“No. I just...I just need to lie down.”

“Very well.”

Iason arrived back at the beach house and watched Riki bolt from the car and hurry inside. He scowled then followed.

“Is something wrong with Master Riki?” Cal asked immediately.

“He apparently ate something that did not agree with him. Prepare a stomach remedy.” Iason stepped into the master bedroom, found it empty then heard the water in the shower running. He moved into the bathroom, spotted Riki’s boots and jacket, then pulled back the glass doors to the shower and was shocked to find Riki standing inside with his clothes still on.

“What has come over you, Riki?”

Riki just ducked his head under the spray. “Thought I...might be sick again,” he muttered.

“So you got in the shower fully clothed?” Iason pulled off his gloves, reached in to switch off the water and put his fingers to Riki’s forehead. His pet was hot, did he have a fever? “Come out of there before you make yourself worse.”

Riki stepped out, he’d been in too much of a panic to think about adjusting the temperature, he had simply switched on the water and stepped in, hoping to rinse Mimea’s scent off his clothes. The water had been freezing and now he was starting to shiver.

Cal appeared and his eyebrows rose.

“Fetch Riki’s robe and prepare some hot tea.”

“Right away, Master.”

Iason reached for Riki’s sodden clothes. “I don’t understand what you were thinking,” he began as he pulled the mongrel’s shirt over his head, then an unfamiliar smell caught his enhanced nose. His eyes remained on his pet’s as he pulled the shirt closer, inhaled and watched Riki pale.

Dropping the shirt he yanked Riki to him and again inhaled. There was a smell on his pet, a feminine smell. Grabbing Riki’s hair hard enough to hurt he yanked the younger man’s head back to expose his throat.

“Is there something you would like to tell me, Riki?”

Those cold blue eyes made Riki shiver more. “N...no.”

Even though his meeting with Mimea had been unplanned and perfectly innocent he couldn't take the chance that it would infuriate the Blondie; that Iason would have something horrible done to the girl. He'd failed Mimea once before, he wouldn't do so again.

“I see.” Iason stepped back. “I am very disappointed in you, Riki.”

Riki's eyes only had a second to widen as Iason's fingers moved to his ring. “N...” Screaming hot pain speared through his groin and thrust itself through his entire body. “St...” The pain increased and he dropped down onto the wet tiles, curling into himself instinctively.

“The truth, Riki.”

“T...Told the t...tru...AHHHHHHH!” His back arched off the floor in a tortured spasm of agony as tears flooded his eyes. Fuck! Oh, sweet fucking God! He couldn't speak, couldn't think, all he could do was scream, all he knew was mind-numbing, blinding hot pain.

Seeing that Riki's eyes were about to roll back in his head, forcing him to pass out, Iason twisted the ring back and watched Riki's body go slack. He crouched beside his sobbing pet.

“I will not stop the next time, Riki,” he warned, coldly. “Why do you smell of a woman?”

Riki curled up in a ball again and glared at Iason with bright, vivid hatred. How could he do that to him? How could Iason resort to this again after all that he had done for him lately, how well behaved he had been? He thought things had been better between them, clearer. He'd been a fool. Iason was his master and he was still just a fucking worthless pet.

“Go to...hell.” Riki braced himself for the next wave of pain, as he watched Iason rise.

“Very well,” Iason sighed as Cal meekly appeared with Riki’s robe. “Cal, put him on the bed, get him cleaned up and dry but do not dress him.”

“Yes, Master.”

Riki watched Iason leave, he knew his punishment was far from over. He accepted Cal’s hand up because he would never have made it up himself. That was the highest level he had ever experienced, his head was swimming, his body still singing from the memory of the pain and his legs shaking so badly he could barely walk.

With Cal’s support Riki got to the bed, had his wet clothes removed and Cal dried him off quickly and efficiently. Then the furniture wiped his mouth, where Riki had bitten through his lip.

“Go,” he croaked to the furniture as he pulled the sheets over his body, knowing they would hardly keep Iason out. “Just go.” He didn’t want Cal to see any more violence than was necessary and Riki knew there would be plenty coming up.

Cal left, closing the door and Riki sat with his legs pulled up to his chest as he waited for Iason to return. He was trembling again, because he knew whatever was coming would be bad, really bad, and also he was afraid he would not be able to keep his secret if Iason decided to really hurt him.

Tears pricked his eyes again and he pushed them back. No. He wouldn’t cry again. He’d taken everything Iason had handed out so far, right? He could take more. Iason hadn’t beaten him, he would never fully defeat him. Fuck Iason Mink.

The door open and Riki tensed, but forced himself to meet his master’s gaze. When he spotted the vile of blue held between Iason’s fingers his fear spiked, but he still didn’t look away. Aphrodisiac? It looked like one. Fine, that was how it was going to be was it? So be it.

“I fucking hate you,” Riki spat, his fear and frustration causing him to retaliate with the only weapon he had, his lashing tongue. “Do whatever the fuck you want, but don’t expect me to be a docile little pet anymore. I’ll

fight you on everything, Iason, until you either let me go or kill me, your choice.”

Cold, unwavering eyes held Riki’s without even a hint his words had any impact. “You made the choice to come back, and to accept whatever that choice entailed.”

“So do it then!” Riki screamed at him. He was angry, so very angry because they’d had such a good couple of days. Life had almost seemed normal, nice even, and now it was back to this again. To master and fucking pet. “You want to drug me, fuck me, beat me. Do it!”

“You were so afraid of this before, you trembled in my arms, begged me for mercy, so why now do you demand it?”

“You’re going to do whatever the hell you want anyway, no matter what I say, so why waste my breath? I hope you’ve got a good supply, because you’re gonna need it to get anywhere near me again. You’ll have what you want then, right? A useless, mindless, fucking sex doll!”

That actually hit home. Riki saw the moment of impact as those icy blue eyes flashed with fury. He flinched when the vile smashing against the wall, blue liquid splattering across it, and suddenly Iason was across the room and yanking him up by his throat.

“Do you think I need such concoctions to have you, pet?” he growled. “I can make you respond with very little effort, and we both know it.” He shoved Riki back against the headboard, pinned his wrists over his head with one hand, ripped back the sheets to grip Riki’s member in his other hand. “Your belong to me!”

Riki winced, his cock was still so sore from the damn pet ring, but even through the pain he could feel himself responding to Iason’s touch and hated himself, hated them both for it. “Fuck you! I belong to myself!”

“Your fear makes you vulgar, pet.” Iason’s voice returned to its usual cold monotone, which frightened Riki even more. “I’ll have to punish you for

that as well, but first..." He released Riki and caught his chin. "Let's call Cal in, shall we?"

"No!" Fuck no! "He doesn't have anything to do with this! This is between you and me, Iason!"

"Then tell me why you smell like a woman, Riki."

"I didn't do anything. I just went to the fucking washroom!"

"Yet you have perfume on your shirt and around your neck. Did they have samples in the bathroom and you decided to try them out?"

Riki glared at him. Iason knew there were no samples. "I didn't do anything."

"Riki."

"Nothing happened!"

Iason tsked then dipped his head to suckle Riki's nipple, felt the young man's body arch in response. "We were having such a lovely day, and you've gone and ruined it. Now, instead of making love to you the way I had intended, I have to punish you for lying to me."

"I'm not lying..." Riki hissed as Iason released him suddenly and twisted the ring. "Fuck!" It wasn't the same level of pain, but it still hurt like hell. A moment later it switched to the pleasure mode, which Riki actually hated more. He'd rather scream in fury then gasp in pleasure in front of Iason. "F...fucker."

Riki watched through glazed eyes Iason slowly removed his clothing. This was gonna be bad, this was gonna be so bad. He closed his eyes and gave himself up to the inevitable.

Hours later, Iason glared at his pet, frustrated. Riki, robbed of the ability to move or speak, his face still wet from his tears, did not react as his master rose from the bed and pulled on a robe. Iason stepped out of the room and

called for Cal to clean Riki up, then he contacted Marjan and requested the surveillance videos for their time at the casinos earlier that evening.

The feed was sent to Iason's tablet within minutes and it took Iason only a few seconds to scan through the footage and find the portion where Riki walked to the washrooms. It took him a few more moments to recognize the woman speaking to his pet, and when he did a surge of fury and then fear spread through him. Mimea! Why the hell was that slut at the casino? She was a worker? How was that possible? Raoul had told him she had been sold to a brothel.

He watched the exchange, wishing he had audio, but even without he could tell that Riki was incredibly afraid the entire time. He had obviously been shocked at seeing Mimea, but he kept looking towards the entrance to the washroom, as if waiting for someone to appear. Worried he would get caught with her, yes, certainly, but why would that make him nervous if they were not doing anything?

Eventually, the girl threw herself at Riki, kissed him and he pushed her away. Mimea hurried off and Riki went into the men's room, where there were no cameras. Unable to stand not knowing what was said, he called Marjan back and requested a holo conference with the waitresses.

When Mimea came on the screen Iason watched her eyes widen in fear at the sight of him. Iason agreed to allow Marjan to stay during the call and the owner stood just behind Mimea, his hands on her shoulders as the female pet was visibly shaking.

"Hello, Mimea."

"M...M...Master Mink."

"I believe you spoke with Riki this evening."

Mimea's eyes widened further and she started to shake even more "He t...told you?"

"Did you not expect him not to?"

“I...he...he just...he seemed so afraid of you finding out about me working there. He wanted me to hide. He said you’d be really angry if you knew I was there and he didn’t want to be responsible again.”

“Responsible?”

She nodded as tears started sliding down her cheeks. “He...he knows you hate me because of...because of before and he...he didn’t want me to get hurt again.”

Iason’s hands tightened below where the screen would show, but his face remained impassive. “Riki cares about you so much?”

“Oh no! I mean...I...I loved Riki, really I did, and I...I was the one who talked him into...into mounting me. He was just so sad and angry all the time. I was a foolish girl and I...I just...wanted to make him feel better. Make us both feel better.” She wiped at her tears. “I know you hurt him because of that, and I know he felt bad for not speaking up for me before. I’ve got a new life now, Master Iason, a good life, and it is well within your rights to do what you wish to me, but Riki was only trying to protect me. Not because he loves me or anything, I think...I think because he feels responsible for what happened before. We only talked and...I did try to kiss him but he pushed me away. That’s all we did. That’s everything, I swear!”

Iason watched the girl crumble into a sobbing mess in Marjan’s arms and felt the tightness in his chest ease. “Thank you for telling me the truth, Mimea.”

Marjan whispered to the girl and she bolted out of the room.

Marjan, I apologize for disturbing you so late.”

“Oh, we’re always awake here, Iason. So, what will you with her, then? She is a good worker, but I will not deny you your rights.”

“I have no rights to her, she belongs to you.” Besides, anything he did would only wound his pet more if Riki learned about it. “I believe enough has been done tonight.”

Marjan nodded, wished Iason a good evening and signed off.

Iason sighed heavily and walked back to the bedroom. Once again his mongrel was suffering to protect someone else. Just as he had for Darryl, for his gang and his ex-lover. Now he had accepted further pain and humiliation to fulfill some sort of self-prescribed debt to Raoul's former pet.

He could understand Riki's devotion to his friends; it was a weakness that he had exploited to get Riki to return, but he never understood why Riki had tried to take the punishment for a furniture or for Mimea, as it had been their actions that had caused Riki to be punished.

He paused at the door of the bedroom. Riki was lying on his side, asleep and Cal was just moving away from the bed, a syringe in his hand. "I...gave him a painkiller and a sedative, Master. He was in quite a bit of pain."

Iason nodded, felt a numbness crawl through him as he turned his gaze back to his unconscious pet. He walked over, sat on the bed and caressed Riki's hair. "Why can't you love me? What must I do to own your heart as well as your body?"

With a sigh, he rose, then stepped out and closed the door behind him.

Chapter 10

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason is upset Riki is still angry, but a bit of alcohol and music seems to lighten their moods considerably

Iason stared at his computer terminal, but wasn't really focused on it, his thoughts were on Riki. It had been almost a week since they had been to the beach, and things between he and Riki were severely strained. He had even taken another business trip that had kept him away the last four days, and had come his regular office to work instead of going home when he arrived back this morning. He could admit that he had lost his temper with his pet that night, knew he had hurt Riki because of his own selfish, unreasonable jealousy.

His pet had held strong, through the humiliation, the pain, and the hours of brutal sex. He had pleaded for release, pleaded for Iason to stop, cursed and threatened him, but he'd never admitted the truth of what happened at the casino. He had protected Mimea through all of it and that still angered Iason.

He had given his pet two days to recover from when he had lost his temper, because he truly regretted hurting Riki, but once those two days were up he had expected to be able to make love to his pet. He suspected that there might still be sort of battle with Riki, given the threats his pet had made that day, but he had hoped that Riki would realize he was wrong to lie about Mimea and things would return to normal.

Instead, whenever Iason came home, he found Riki horribly intoxicated and positively reeking of cigarettes. His pet was compliant with his master's demands, but the alcohol deadened Riki's reactions to the extent, that he may as well have been fucking a sex doll. After two days of that, he had Cal lock up the alcohol and took away Riki's cigarettes. He expected Riki's tantrum to extend to refusing to eat or bathe next, as he had several years before, but his pet had learned his lesson then. He knew the furniture would be punished if a pet was not properly cared for, and so he ate and bathed as

he was supposed to, but their meals together were as silent as the grave. No amount of prompting would get the mongrel to speak not even when Iason tried to provoke him into anger.

First Mimea, then Cal, Iason couldn't; understand why Riki had so much forgiveness and loyalty for a pet and a furniture and none for him. It was excruciatingly frustrating. Why couldn't Riki just belong to him? Why couldn't Riki love and accept him? After all, he had made several adjustments just to have the mongrel as his pet, had broken several rules of his own people, and yet Riki showed no gratitude for his sacrifice.

He would do anything to make Riki happy, well, any reasonable thing. Riki had accepted his life as a pet, he had returned to Eos and accepted that he belonged to a master, and yet because of one incident Riki was acting almost as belligerent as he had in the beginning. It honestly made Iason want to pull his hair out!

Picking up several strands of the blond tresses that fell over his shoulders he wondered if he could pull it out? He supposed he could, but would it grow back? A Blondie's hair was simply there, it never grew and was never cut, that he was aware of. No, he wouldn't pull it out, he liked his hair. Riki liked his hair, he liked to play with it when he was in the throes of passion. Iason smirked remembering several instances when Riki did just that, curling strands of his master's hair through his fingers with a gentleness that contradicted the urgency of his other responses during that time.

He sighed. Why couldn't things be like that all of the time?

"You look very contemplative."

Iason didn't even bother to look up at Raoul as his friend entered his office. "It is my job to contemplate, consider and chose."

"That look is different from your work look." Raoul settled into a desk chair, crossed one long leg over the other. "Trouble with your mongrel again?"

"No."

“Oh? Usually that’s the only thing to put you into such a state.”

“What state is that, Raoul?”

“You’ve been staring at the same information for almost fifteen minutes and have made no move to adjust or accept it.”

“I have already adjusted it; I simply haven’t sent the results yet.”

“Why not?”

Iason touched a key on his terminal and the data closed. “There, now it is sent.”

“You didn’t answer my question, Iason.”

“Your question is invalid, Raoul.” Iason rose and pulled on his cloak. He wanted to go home, but he didn’t want to face another night with a sullen pet. Besides, if he went home and Riki was still in that awful mood his temper might snap and he could make things much worse. “Shall we go for a drink?”

Raoul blinked and rose. “You haven’t asked me in quite awhile.”

“Are you declining?”

“Of course not.”

The two men left the office and headed for the lifts.

“I am simply surprised. I expected you would want to rush home to that pet of yours.”

“I would like to relax first, is that so hard to believe?”

“No. It is always a pleasure to have a drink with you, Iason.”

Riki awoke from another nightmare staring his old paring partner. It was very similar to the last one, including Guy becoming Iason during sex, only they never ended up burning this time. This time, Riki felt like they were falling, he and Iason both, into a bottomless pit and it had been so dark and cold. He kept calling for Iason, but the Blondie wouldn't answer him. He could feel Iason in his arms as they fell, but the Blondie refused to answer him and that scared him more than the burning had. Guilt, fear and sadness had engulfed him, why wouldn't Iason talk to him? Why wouldn't he respond?

Sitting up, he rubbed his neck and stared down at the pale blue sheets of his bed. Iason had been gone for four days, he should be happy about it, but he wasn't. Things had been tense between them since the beach house. He was still pretty pissed off about it. Was that why his dream had a different ending?

He had tried to rebel the first few days by drinking several bottles of Sake every night, as he had in the very beginning, trying to drown his sorrows. He also smoked as many cigarettes as he could, ignoring Iason's rule of only one or two a day, knowing the Blondie would find the scent on him disagreeable. By the time Iason returned home, he was in a state where he neither cared what the Blondie did to him nor could he even respond properly. Sake always dulled his senses, making him sluggish and compliant, too much apparently as it seemed to turn Iason off completely.

Iason had Cal lock up the liquor and took away his cigarettes, but Riki simply went out, on one of his very rare excursions to the shopping areas, bought a pack and hid them. It was easy enough to smoke in the bathroom with the window open, but he suspected that Cal knew he was doing it, Cal knew everything that went on in the home of his master, but the furniture had not reported it to Iason, because otherwise the cigarettes would have been taken away again.

Tuning his gaze to the wall, there was no window in this room; the pet room; he let his eyes adjust to the darkness until he could make out the spare pieces of furniture in the room. He was sleeping in here again because

there was no way he'd willingly go back to sleeping in Iason's room. That bastard had hurt him, again, and he would not forgive him this time. Granted, he had lied about Mimea, but that was no excuse for what Iason did. He should have just trusted him, believed him, but instead he flew off the handle, as usual. Bastard.

"For fuck sake!" Riki sat up, angrily and tossed back the covers.

Why was he even thinking of that cold-hearted prick anyway? He was glad Iason wasn't home! It wasn't like he missed him or anything, for fuck sake. His body missed him, sure, but he'd gone longer; hell he had survived an entire year without the Blondie's touch, he could certainly survive a few more days. Iason would take him when he returned, he was sure of that because Iason would need to reassert control over his precious pet, right? It had nothing to do with wanting Riki, or caring about him, it was just about control and satisfying the perverted needs of an android. He was nothing to Iason but an outlet for sex.

Not liking where his thoughts were taking him, Riki snatched the first thing from his closet, a pair of black, low rising jeans and slid into them. He did up his zipper, but didn't bother with the top button as they were tight enough they would not slip off.

Stepping out of his room, he paused for a moment as he recalled how he used to have to call Daryl to let him out as Iason always locked him in at night. He knew Daryl had been 'discontinued' as the other pets called it and that still really bothered him. Iason would never tell him what happened to Daryl after the furniture had opened the doors of Eos to let him outside.

When he returned and found Cal was Iason's new furniture, he had promised not to let himself get close to the boy, but that had been difficult because sometimes there was only the two of them and there was a natural progression of camaraderie after awhile. When he had heard about Daryl he changed his mind about keeping his distance and started being nicer to Cal. There was no telling what might set Iason off to have this furniture disposed of, so he would try to be considerate of Cal's position, within reason. He still insisted on washing his own ass.

He didn't completely understand why Daryl did what he did. He moved to the parlor and stared out the floor to ceiling windows of the wrap around balcony. It was very late, the sky was a deep raven black, but the bright lights of the city shone in through the windows casting a subtle bluish glow on the white furniture. The darkness reminded him of the pit in his dream and he tried to shake it away.

“I need a drink.”

Stepping into the dining room he moved to the wall opposite the table. Pressing his fingers to the palm plate just to the left, he smirked when it flashed red. “Denied?” Oh yeah, Iason told Cal to lock up the liquor. “Well, fine then.”

Heading to his room, he collected his little multi-tool, and then returned to the dining room. Humming to himself he removed the front of the plate, then propped the thin tool in his mouth as he coded in a sequence of numbers, crossed two wires and coded in a second series. The wall panel slid open revealing the fully stocked bar.

“Lovely,” he smirked as he connected the plate to the panel again. He ran his fingers over the multiple sizes of colored bottles. Not in the mood for Sake, or for whiskey, he selected a thin decorative bottle from the top of the shelf. He pulled the cap off, sniffed and nodded.

Cal stepped down into the dining area just as the bar panel was sliding back into place. “Riki.”

Riki almost smiled at the disapproval in the young man’s voice. “Go back to bed, Cal.”

“Master Iason said no more liquor.”

“Master Iason isn’t here.”

“Please put it back.”

“Nope.”

Cal sighed. "I have not told him about the smoking, but I will have to tell him about this."

Cal had held back on that small indiscretion because his master would not be back until tomorrow, in which case he would be taking Riki's cigarettes away in the morning and making sure that Riki bathed to erase the smell. He didn't see the harm in letting the mongrel smoke while Iason wasn't there, and it was a small concession to thank Riki for at least trying to teach him to swim.

He lifted a firm gaze to the mongrel. "I don't want either of us to get punished, so please put it back."

"I'm just going to have one drink. I can't sleep..."

"I'll give you a sedative..."

"I don't like how they make me feel."

"Some tea or warm milk?"

"No, I want this."

"I can't let you have it, Master Riki!" Cal stepped up, determined to get the liquor from Riki regardless of what it took. He had to obey his master. "I insist that you give it to me now."

Riki scowled and handed the bottle over to him. "Fine! Take it."

Relief flooded the young furniture. He really didn't want to resort to the electric wand he carried in his pocket. He could not take Riki physically, but he had to obey his master's order and would use whatever he could to do so.

"Thank you." He would take the Sake to his room and put it away in the morning. Better to keep the cabinet closed and Riki away from it all together. "Would you like me to make you some tea, instead?"

"No. I'll just put on some music and try to relax."

“Are you sure? You won’t go into the cabinet again, will you?”

“No.”

“Promise?”

“Yeah, I promise to stay out of the cabinet.”

Cal nodded. “Okay then. Good night.”

“Night.”

Riki waited until he heard the subtle click of Cal’s bedroom door behind the kitchen, then reached beneath the table by the head chair and plucked out the tall bottle he had already chosen. He’d heard Cal coming so had grabbed the Sake as a decoy. He didn’t want the boy to get into trouble either, but he also needed something to help him stop thinking so much.

Riki returned to the parlor, poured himself a generous helping of the thin golden liquid and knocked it back. Wow! That shit tasted pretty damn good! It was kind of sweet, almost like candy and not like regular alcohol at all.

He picked up the remote and programmed some music, then took the bottle and his glass out to the balcony. Pouring another glass he lit a cigarette and inhaling deeply. Exhaling the smoke with a slow, deep sigh, he poured another drink then sipped as his thoughts drifted back to his dream.

He had let Guy knock him around before he’d left Ceres, worked his friend up enough that his anger had taken over. Iason had told him to break all contact and make sure it stayed broken. The only way to do that was to make Guy hate him. He’d said horrible things that night and regretted every single one of them, but he’d done it to keep Guy safe.

There should be no reason for him to be dreaming of Guy again, he had made his peace with his decision to return to Iason, and usually once he made peace with something he didn’t allow it to bother him again. Was it just the feeling of betrayal he had when Iason punished him because of Mimea that triggered it? He certainly felt betrayed when the Blondie

showed up in Ceres a year and a half later and forced him to return. And he knew that Guy felt betrayed by his actions before he left. Had that been what sparked the dream?

The moonlight caught the metal of his bracelet to glitter. Why was he even wearing this thing still? He was pissed off at Iason, right? So why was he still wearing something that bastard gave him? What was up with that anyway? Why did Iason bother buying him gifts and shit? Was he trying to buy his affection or something? Well, it wasn't going to work. He could never feel affection for Iason. He could never feel anything but resentment for the man who had ruined his life. Still, it had shocked him that Iason's hands had trembled a little when he'd asked him to put the bracelet on him; he was usually so calm and cold. It couldn't have been from anger, Iason seemed pleased that he'd accepted the gift.

Christ, it was so hard trying to figure the Blondie out. Riki fingered the chain on his wrist. Why had he kept it? Why not put it in the closet with the others, after Diman and Aleia had left? Maybe because Iason had been especially nice to him when he had been so upset after Aleia had come on to him on the balcony? He'd been sure that Iason was going to take the situation wrong and punish him. Instead he had believed Riki, had taken him to his room to calm down and even let him smoke. It had been a side he hadn't seen from Iason before and it confused the hell out of him.

The whole dinner on the balcony thing had really thrown him, and then going to the beach... What was Iason trying to do? What could possibly be in it for the elite to bother being nice to his pet? Not that Iason was always cruel, in fact most of the time he was kind of indulgent, almost tender really. It was only when Riki acted up that the cruelty came out. But, no, there was more to it than that.

Iason had deliberately provoked him by letting Diman touch him and treat him like an animal. Iason had to know that was a breaking point for him, and yet he still did it and then punished him for it. Iason was sick, that's all there was too it. There was just no sense to him.

Seeing that his glass was empty, he topped it up again then hopped up on his perch; he might just finish the whole bottle off at this rate, and what

would his dear Blondie master think about that? Did he give a fuck, not at this precise moment no. Tanagura may be considered the center of culture and refinement but it was just another shithole to him, full of assholes, snobs and people far too willing to make your life miserable.

He hated it here, but he had hated living in Ceres too. At least he had some level of respect in Ceres, here he had nothing; he was nothing. Iason proved that after their night at the casino. Iason had been gone four days and Riki had no idea when he was coming back. He felt conflicted, because a large part of him enjoyed the break from sex and the android's manipulations and yet...he also missed it.

It had been really hard for him to get used to the lack of stimulation that year he had been free. Every time he woke up he expected Iason to be taking him or touching him and his dreams had been a mixture of erotic scenes and brutal nightmares. Guy probably would have been more than willing to have sex, but Riki hadn't been able to cross that line. He knew that Guy couldn't make him feel the way that Iason did and that made him feel ashamed and guilty. His body belonged to Iason Mink, whether he wore a pet ring or a collar, or if he was free living in the slums, that had become a fact he could not change.

And that was the real kicker, wasn't it, that fact was really why he was feeling so conflicted. He did belong to Iason, he knew it, his body and his heart knew it, and that was the real reason he had returned. It wasn't to save Guy and his friends. It wasn't out of fear or a sense of entrapment. He returned because there was nowhere else he could be, nowhere else he wanted to be.

Iason Mink wasn't human and he wasn't kind. He was a merciless taskmaster with perverted tendencies and selfish demands. Riki was a slum mongrel with too much pride and not enough stamina to break the bonds that bound him to a Blondie of Tanagura. He wanted, needed freedom, but he had stopped running.

How could he hate Iason, but still long for his touch? How could he miss someone who consistently hurt and humiliated him? Why did he feel the need to rebel against Iason one minute, then curl up in his lap the next? He

was trapped in a cage of his own making, and it was driving him crazy. He felt like he was sinking in quicksand and refusing to reach for a branch to pull himself free.

“It’s so fucked up,” he muttered. “I’m so fucked up.”

The song changed to a hard jazzy rhythm and it reminded Riki of one that had been playing at the club he and his crew frequented. He remembered Guy pestering him to dance to it all the time, and he’d been so adorably eager that Riki always relented. It didn’t hurt his reputation to dance with his partner, at least no one would say anything to his face about it, and so they had danced and it had felt really good.

Needing something to pull him out of the emotional black hole he was digging himself into, he finished off his drink for the third time, ignored the way it made his head spin, then tossed his cigarette over the edge, and slid down off the ledge. He set the glass on the ledge by the bottle, closed his eyes and swayed to the music trying to envision Guy in his arms, moving their bodies against each other in a slow, sensuous rhythm.

He actually really loved to dance, although he always put up a bit of a fight whenever Guy asked him for appearance's sake, but he liked losing himself in the music and letting it carry him away from his life to a better place, a better feeling. He wondered briefly if Iason ever danced, but then the music had him floating, up through clouds of misty blues and soft greys and he started to hum.

Cal watched Riki moving in slow sensuous rhythm along the balcony, not all that different from what he had seen other pets do at the socials for entertainment, but their dances were specifically used to arouse, where as Riki’s dance was different somehow. He had suspected that Riki may have returned to the cabinet despite his promise, and sure enough he had another bottle of liquor. Cal had intended to take it away, but had been mesmerized by the sight before him.

The mongrel’s eyes were closed and he sported a look that was not at all enticing or flirtatious, as what a pet would use. What could put such a look on his face, Cal wondered, and why couldn’t Riki look like that more often?

He knew Riki wasn't happy here, and in this moment he looked...well, perhaps not happy just...serene? Peaceful? Riki was so beautiful, his face betrayed all of his emotions and Cal envied that ability.

In a voice as smooth and smoky as the cigarettes he consumed Riki started to sing, and Cal's heart almost stopped beating. Such a beautiful sound! He had heard other pets sing, sometimes it raised the price if a pet could entertain outside of the sexual aspect, and so they would be professionally trained, but this.... Riki was far better than any of the pets he had heard sing; his tone made Cal think of a pool of melted caramel, rich, velvety, tranquil and swirling with such depth and color that you couldn't help but dip your finger in for a taste, even if you did get burned.

"Is moonlight through the pines, other arms reach out to me, other eyes smile tenderly. Still in the peaceful dreams I see, the road leads back to you."

Cal tried to comprehend the words, but they were alien compared to songs he knew, and just as he started to understand, the song changed. He glanced towards the door as it opened and carefully stepped back into the shadows and against the wall as Iason entered. Iason was surprised to hear music on this late at night, and when he stepped down into the living area he spotted the reason.

Love can be a many splendored thing

Can't deny the joy it brings

A dozen roses, diamond rings

Dreams for sale and fairy tales

Cal had never seen his master look shocked, had never seen such an expression on any Blondie for that matter and he was intrigued by what his master would do to Riki now. When Iason moved towards his pet, Cal decided it would be better for him to head back to his room. Some things needed to be private.

Riki was still lost in the music when he felt hands curl around him from behind, and whether he was fully relaxed and in a good mood from the music, the from the alcohol, or just the fact that he was being touched again, he leaned against Iason's hard chest and lifted his arms up to link his fingers around the Blondie's neck.

"Hey," he murmured, more than a little pleased when Iason's body started to sway with his. "You're back."

It'll make you hear a symphony

And you just want the world to see

But like a drug that makes you blind

It'll fool ya every time

Iason glanced at the bottle of his finest liqueur and blinked. The alcohol content was almost a hundred proof, and was expected to be sipped as its effects could be lethal. Riki had obviously had more than one glass. He was in shock that his pet was still able to stand upright, obviously Riki had a very high tolerance for alcohol.

"I am, indeed," he murmured as he nuzzled Riki's neck, delighted when the mongrel tilted his head sideways to allow him better access. Oh yes, his pet was quite drunk, but it was a different effect than what he had experienced earlier in the week. Riki was more relaxed than dulled.

The trouble with love is

It can tear you up inside

Make your heart believe a lie

It's stronger than your pride

Riki felt so good, so comfortable and finally Iason was home and was touching him again. He forgot about being angry, forgot about being hurt. This was so nice, just being here with Iason. It was so nice.

He turned in Iason's arms, let his hand slide down to grip the sides of Iason's jacket and put his head against the Blondie's chest, pressed his hips against him, not in need but more in direction.

The trouble with love is

It doesn't care how fast you fall

And you can't refuse the call

See, you got no say at all

Iason placed his hands on Riki's hips and followed his pet's lead, pleased that Riki seemed to have forgiven him, at least for now, and slowly rotated their bodies around the balcony. So, this was dancing, he thought, intrigued. There didn't seem to be much to it, but he had to admit it was very relaxing.

"Do you like this, Riki?"

"Hmmm."

"Would you like to do this more often?"

"Sssshh." Riki's hand moved to cover Iason's mouth. "*Listen* to the music."

Now I was once a fool

it's true I played the game by all the rules

But now my world's a deeper blue

I'm sadder, but I'm wiser too

Iason's eyebrows rose at the lyrics, was Riki trying to tell him something with such words? Dancing and music was obviously something Riki enjoyed, so he would make sure they did it more often. He had to admit, it felt amazing to just hold his pet, have Riki return his embrace as they move together in an easy synchronicity.

Not that this did anything to dampen his ardour, if anything seeing Riki swaying so seductively on the balcony when he had entered the condo had aroused him instantly, and he had intended to pull his pet to the bedroom and take him hard and fast, especially as he had been denied that pleasure for several days now. Then Riki had touched him, leaned into him willingly and he'd been so thrilled by it he'd been afraid to do anything that would break the spell.

I swore I'd never love again

I swore my heart would never mend

Said love wasn't worth the pain

But then I hear it call my name

“So, you are no longer angry with me?”

“Yeah, I am.” Riki pulled back to look up at Iason, marveled at how a demon could appear so like an angel. He was still angry, but he didn't want to stop dancing, didn't want to end this perfect moment. Laying his head against Iason's chest again he coiled the Blondie's hair around his fingers. “I'll be angry tomorrow.”

The trouble with love

is It can tear you up inside

Make your heart believe a lie

It's stronger than your pride

Iason resisted the urge to crush Riki to him, his pet's words had a startling effect on him and he wasn't sure what to make of it, then recalled the sound of Riki's voice when he had entered the condo.

“Sing for me, pet.”

“Say please.”

Iason's eyebrow rose. "Please."

And so Riki began to sing again.

The trouble with love is

It doesn't care how fast you fall

And you can't refuse the call

See, you got no say at all

Iason jerked as an electrical impulse exploded across his brain, but even with a thorough diagnostic he could not find the cause. He had no heart, yet he felt that strange painful tightening in his chest again. What was causing it? What was happening to him? He probably should get a check up with Raoul, make sure that everything was functioning properly.

Every time I turn around

I think I've got it all figured out

My heart keeps callin' and I keep on fallin'

Over and over again

"Hey!"

Riki stopped singing when he realized Iason had stopped moving. In the process of diagnosing his issue Iason had gone momentarily dormant without realizing, it.

"Oh. Apologies, pet." Iason started swaying again to the music, sliding his hands over Riki's bare skin as they kept the rhythm.

"Hmmm...feels good."

Iason couldn't take it anymore, he crushed his lips to Riki's in an urgent, demanding kiss. He was severely aroused; feeling his pet against him,

hearing the softness of his pet's voice, the enticement in Riki's touch was just too much.

This sad story always ends the same

Me standin' in the pourin' rain

It seems no matter what I do

It tears my heart in two

Riki's arms wound around Iason's neck as the Blondie's tongue slipped into his mouth and ravished him. "Nice," he moaned. "Be nice...soft, like the music."

Iason complied, it was the first time Riki had made such a request and so he softened the kis, made it more sensuous then watched, stunned, as Riki's eyes fluttered closed. He continued to turn their bodies with the music and kept the kiss at the same gentle tempo, watching to see if Riki would open his eyes again. When he didn't, Iason let his own eyes close with a soft sigh.

The trouble with love, yeah

It can tear you up inside

Make your heart believe a lie

It's stronger than your pride

They kissed and danced through to the end of the song and then Riki stilled, as if suddenly realizing who it was he had been dancing with. His eyes flew open and he stepped away from Iason, flushed.

Shit! What the hell was he doing? What had he been thinking? His head was swimming and he tingled as if being tagged by tiny little pleasure pricks all over his body. He glanced at the half empty bottle of liquor, was it drugged? Was that what had him hanging all over Iason like a slut in heat?

Sensing Riki's internal conflict Iason explained. "That particular brand of liqueur has quite a high alcohol content, Riki. It's meant to be sipped in very small doses, not by the tumbler-full."

"I...I didn't know." Riki flushed again, he'd had what...three, four glasses? What an idiot. "I guess you're pissed now."

True Iason had forbade any more alcohol, and Riki had obviously broken into the cabinet, since he knew that Cal would never have opened it for him. He'd also spotted Riki's cigarettes on the ledge, so his pet had broken the rules, but how could he be upset over that when he'd been able to see such a new and intriguing side of Riki because of it?

"No."

"R...really?"

Iason stepped close again missing the younger man's warmth, caught Riki's chin and lifted so their eyes met. "You may be pissed tomorrow with the headache you will no doubt have from it."

"I've been hung-over before."

"Indeed." Iason dipped his head and kissed Riki again, slowly, deliberately, then lifted his head again just enough so he could see Riki's face. "Thank you for the dance."

Riki's face flamed as he tried to pull away, but Iason simply slid his free arm around Riki's waist and pulled him closer.

"Did you miss me?"

"No."

"Not even a little?"

"No."

Iason smirked at his pet's stubbornness, for even now, Riki's body was unconsciously arching towards him. "Just my touch then?" He slid his hand over the dark, smooth chest, heard Riki's breath hitch. "I'll take that much for now." He leaned down and took one of Riki's nipples in his mouth. "I missed you."

"You...ahhh....suck..."

"Sometimes. Shall I demonstrate?"

Riki winced at his poor choice of words, and then cried out as Iason suddenly slung him over his shoulder. "What? Hey! Put me the fuck down!"

"I seriously doubt you could make it to the bedroom on your own steam after all you've had to drink, so this is much faster."

"I'm not that drunk!"

"You were dancing alone on our balcony and singing, Riki."

Our balcony? Riki's eyes widened, as Iason opened his bedroom door and stepped inside. "Okay, I'm...could be... a little drunk, but I can wa...ooof!" The breath whooshed out of him as Iason tossed him on the bed. "*What?*" he began lifting up on his elbows and swiping his hair out of his face. "Is your problem?"

"I have no problems at the moment," Iason assured as he methodically began to undress. "Remove your clothes, Riki."

There was a warning in the back of his mind somewhere, a red light flashing Danger Danger, and yet his body was too relaxed to care. Instead, Riki rolled over. "Not in the mood."

Iason started at him, clearly startled, then slowly smiled. Interesting. Riki had polished off many bottles of Sake during his first three years in Eos, and all it seemed to do was make him depressed and ornery. He avoided most other wines or mixed drinks because he was afraid they might be

drugged, but it seems that he'd found a type of alcohol that made him...dare Iason hope...a flirt?

He crawled up on to the bed and pressed himself over Riki's body. "I can put you in the mood, quite easily," he reminded against Riki's ear.

"God...you're fucking heavy. What did Jupiter make you out of, fucking Osmium?"

Iason chuckled. "Close." He sat up and pulled Riki's jeans off, delighted when his pet did not resist.

Riki rolled over and looked up at Iason, tried to focus. "Is that why you wouldn't swim? Cause you'd sink straight to the bottom?"

"Well, I certainly wouldn't float, but nor would I drown. I can move underwater, it is just troublesome." He caressed Riki's cheek. "You however swim like you were born underwater, Riki. I enjoyed watching you."

"I liked swimming." Riki blinked when his eyes grew moist suddenly, and then remembered what else transpired at the beach house. He turned his head away, alarmed to find himself close to tears. "You're such a dick."

"Excuse me?"

"Why'd you have to do that to me, Iason?" Riki felt a lump rise up in his throat, tried to prevent any further words from coming out, but the alcohol had loosened his tongue. He realized he wasn't so much angry at being punished as he was hurt that Iason had been so extreme with it.

"You were lying to me, Riki." Iason didn't want to talk about that now; he didn't want to ruin their good mood.

"I wasn't lying!"

"Then why didn't you tell me about seeing Mimea?"

Riki paled and sat up, pulling himself back from Iason and pressing against the headboard of the bed. “How...how...”

“I asked for the security camera footage, and I spoke with Mimea.”

“W...when?”

“After.” Iason dropped his legs over the side and sat there, feeling the frustration rising within him again. After he had hurt Riki, after he had punished him far too harshly. *After* he started to feel regrets. “She told me you were trying to protect her. Is that true?”

“What...what did you do to her?”

“I did nothing. She belongs to Marjan now. Why did you think I would do anything to her? You claim that the two of you did nothing, right?”

Riki lowered his eyes and it was a long moment before he could speak. “I...I never know what you’re going to do. You...you were so angry before and you...you seem to hate it whenever I mention or even think about Guy or...or if anyone gets anywhere near me. I don’t know what you’ll do, Iason. I just don’t know.”

“So, rather than just tell me the truth you suffered through all of that just on the chance I might hurt Mimea?”

Riki’s silence was his response.

“May I remind you, that it was not at my order that Raoul sold Mimea, that was his choice, his right. I said nothing to him to instigate such a decision. I punished you, made sure you would never do something like that again and that was enough for me.”

Riki realized the truth in Iason’s words and that if Iason had really been that upset about Mimea he could have had her killed outright. So, why had he been so afraid of the Blondie’s reaction at seeing Mimea a second time? Had he overreacted? Brought on his punishment himself? Maybe.

“I...you didn’t have to hurt me so much,” he muttered because an apology just stuck in his craw.

“You made me angry, Riki. I thought we had gotten past such things.”

“Yeah.” So had he, and that was why it had upset him so much. “I...won’t do it again.”

Understanding that was as close as the prideful mongrel would offer to an apology, Iason slid closer, caught Riki’s chin. “I don’t like hurting you, Riki. You do know that, don’t you?”

After a long moment, Riki nodded. He did know that. Iason preferred for him to behave, seemed happier when he behaved and while he showed very little emotion, or guilt while punishing him, he no longer believed that Iason found any real pleasure in it. Perhaps he had at one time, but Riki didn't think that was still the case.

Because the conversation had gotten way too heavy and far too personal, Riki’s next comment was off the cuff. “I think maybe I am drunk.”

“Do you believe that will excuse you from my getting pleasure from you?”

“No, just sayin’.” Riki put his hand to his head. “Head’s spinning.”

“Then let’s find a way to stop it.” Iason leaned forward and captured Riki’s mouth, almost cursing when this time the mongrel did not close his eyes. “You’ve aroused me exponentially, pet. I’m afraid you will not get much sleep tonight.”

Riki sighed and lifted his arms and rested his head on them. “Same shit, different day.” He shuddered as Iason caught his legs, pulled his body further down on the bed. “Do your worst, ya kinky bastard.”

Again Iason chuckled and decided to do just that.

Chapter 11

Summary for the Chapter:

The morning after, Riki is not happy

Riki's eyes opened, he groaned and closed them again. Holy shit! What the hell had happened to him? His whole body was sore, and his head felt like the slightest movement was going to cause it to explode.

He tried again to open his eyes and winced. No. Not going to do that again. "F...fu...ck," he moaned and winced again as the sound of his own voice vibrated off his skull. Tears pricked his eyes. "C...Cal," he croaked, and even that seemed to echo loudly in the room.

Miraculously, Cal appeared with two tablets in his hand and a glass of water.

"I...love you," Riki murmured, causing the furniture to blush and his hand to start shaking, even as Riki managed to lever himself up enough to take the pills and gulp down the water. "Can you...just kill me...now...please?"

Cal's embarrassment turned to amusement as he leaned down to ask "Shall I get..."

Riki's hand slapped against the furniture's mouth and the boy's eyes widened. "S...ssshhh...quiet....whisper," he hissed.

Cal smiled then, he couldn't help it. He waited patiently until Riki's hand dropped away to speak. "Would you like a cold cloth?" he asked as softly as he could.

Riki dropped his head back onto the pillow. " 'kay."

Cal moved to the adjoining washroom and wet a cloth. He returned and placed it against Riki's flushed face. "Better?"

Riki grunted as Iason entered the room and tossed open the drapes with a dramatic flourish.

“How is the drunkard this morning?”

“Aaaaahhhhhhh!” Riki cried, curled into a fetal position under the sheets and cradled his head.

Cal hid a laugh behind his hand and was shocked to see that Iason’s eyes were also twinkling merrily. “He appears to be in some discomfort, Master.”

“Hmmm, serves him right.” Iason waved his hand at Cal, effectively dismissing him, and sat down next to Riki. He pulled the covers down from his pet’s head. “Time to get up, Riki.”

“Fuck off.”

“That mouth of yours...” Iason slapped him hard on the ass and Riki yelped.

“What the hell?”

“Get up.”

Riki reluctantly sat up and opened his bloodshot eyes. “What....do you want?”

“Do you remember last night at all?”

“I remember that I’m never gonna drink that shit again.” He pulled his knees up against his chest and dropped his head into his hands.

“The medication Cal gave you should start to work shortly.” Iason pulled Riki’s chin up for a long, lingering kiss. “You were very inviting last night, pet.”

“W...what do you mean?”

“You flirted with me.”

“I did not!”

“Oh yes you did, I was quite intrigued.” Iason lowered his head and nibbled at Riki’s neck. “I may have you drink that more often.”

“I am not drinking that shit again!”

“Mmmmm...” Iason slid his hand over Riki’s nipple and twisted, watching his pet gasp. “Seems you’re still able to respond.”

“Not...come on...I’m in no...s...shape...”

Iason smiled and cut his pet a break. “Let’s get you in the bath, Cal already has the jets started and you will feel better after.”

Riki could only groan as Iason picked him up, bridal style, then curled his head into Iason’s neck. “Please stop shouting,” he murmured. He didn't care that he was being carried or that he was buck naked. “I’ll do anything if you’ll just stop shouting.”

Iason wasn’t shouting, but he accepted Riki’s offer and put his voice to a whisper. “I accept your offer and will think of a suitable request.”

Riki slid his arm around Iason’s neck. He remembered some of last night, the dancing, pieces of their conversations, some of it about Mimea, and resigned himself to letting the incident at the beach house go. Besides, what good would it do for him to keep fighting? Iason always won, always got what he wanted.

“You’re still a dick.”

Iason smiled as he stepped into the washroom with his pet. Very gently he lowered Riki into the swirling hot water, then disrobed and climbed in next to his pet. He pulled Riki against his chest, understanding that his pet was truly in a state when the mongrel did not even try to resist.

"How is your head now?" Iason asked, continuing to talk as softly as possible, since Riki was barely whispering.

"Feels like it's going to detach and roll off my shoulders."

"That would be distasteful, so let's hope not." Iason entertained himself by massaging Riki's neck and shoulders. "This will help."

Riki moaned and let his head drop as Iason worked his neck muscles. "Shouldn't you..." He hissed as Iason's strong fingers worked out a particular nasty knot between his neck and right shoulder blade. "Be at work?"

"No." He could go into work, but Iason wanted to spend time with Riki, now that they were on better footing again. "I'm interested in what anything covers, so I am yours for the entire day."

"Huh?"

"You said you would do anything if I stopped shouting."

Riki simply sighed. "Bastard."

Iason gently lolled Riki's head back and forth between his capable hands, working out the pressure at the back of his neck. "They were your words, pet."

Riki didn't really care, he was starting to feel better and Iason's fingers were turning him to butter. He could feel himself growing aroused and tried to subtly cover the fact, but of course Iason noticed everything.

"What's this?"

"Nothing. Ignore it."

"Not a chance."

Iason's hand curled around Riki's member and gently stroked, enjoying the gentle moans his touch elicited from his pet. His free hand moved to Riki's nipples, knowing it was one of his pet's pleasure zones, and it moments the mongrel was writhing and panting against him.

"Look at how eager you are, pet, even after all we did last night."

Riki's ability to respond to him was what made him a perfect pet, but it never ceased to amaze Iason how eager the mongrel's body could become with the mildest of stimulation. He had seen that the first time Riki had offered him his body to repay a perceived debt. Since that moment Iason had been unable to think of anything else, and it was fate that had him finding Riki a second time. It would have been impossible to walk away again.

"S....shut....ahhh...up."

Iason smiled as he continued to pleasure the young man in his arms, his keen eyes taking in every one of Riki's responses, his gentle pants, his moans, the way his body shivered and arched and how his fingers dug into the flesh of Iason's legs; as he often did the sheets when they were in the bed.

"So, what will you do for me, Riki? What is to be my reward for speaking quietly and helping ease your discomfort?"

Riki could barely register Iason's words, especially when he felt two fingers slip inside of him. What would he do for Iason? As long as he kept touching him like this, kept giving him such pleasure, he'd do anything. Anything at all, but he couldn't say that.

"W...what...uuuhhh....don't....there....shit...." He gasped when Iason tightened the ring at the base of his cock to keep him from coming. Damn it! "What...do you....ahhh...hhhhnnnn ...ah.....want?" He bit the last word out as Iason started to stroke him again and added a third finger.

"Hmmm...What do I want. I can have anything I want?"

"N....Fuck!" Riki almost reared up out of the water as Iason's fingers hit his prostate. "F...Fu...." He couldn't agree to that! He couldn't promise anything and yet he was powerless to stop the words from tumbling out. "Any...yes...any...what..." Oh God! Again Iason denied him and then suddenly removed his touch, causing Riki to whimper in protest.

"Turn around, Riki."

Riki needed a moment to find his balance after the lack of stimulation, then slowly did as he was asked and let Iason pull him onto his lap, so he was straddling him, but the Blondie didn't enter him.

"Kiss me, Riki."

Riki stared at him beneath passionately hood lids. "W...what?"

"As you did last night. Kiss me like that."

"I...I don't remember..."

"Then I'll refresh your memory." Iason wound his fingers through Riki's hair and pulled him in to capture his mouth in the same sweet way that he had kissed Riki last night, but this time Riki's response was minimal, as it usually was and his eyes stayed open. "That isn't it at all."

"What...that's how we kiss..."

Iason teased Riki's opening with his erection, but did not push in. "If you want me to take you and let you come you have to kiss me the way you did last night."

"Tell me how then!" Riki demanded frustrated. "I don't remember!" He winced and put his hand to his head.

Like a lover, Iason wanted to say, but he knew that would scare his pet. He pushed Riki back into the water and rose. "Never mind."

"Wait!" Riki caught Iason's hand. The Blondie wasn't really going to end things there was he? His body was on fire and bursting at the seams! He needed, wanted release! "I...I'll try."

Iason sat back down, waited as Riki hesitantly moved his face closer. Seeing the concern, the confusion on his pet's face, Iason offered him what encouragement he could. "You said be nice, soft, like the music."

Riki didn't remember the music they had danced to, but leaned in and did his best. He brushed his lips across Iason's, once, twice, and then pressed a little harder. Iason's mouth opened obediently and he tentatively slid his tongue inside.

He expected Iason to intensify the kiss, as he always did, but it remained easy, smooth. Nice, soft...rhythmic and sweet. Riki's eyes started to close of their own volition and he didn't deepen the kiss so much as suddenly fell into it.

A shock curled through his body, wound around his groin and shot up into his heart then dropped into his stomach. Riki broke away, splashed back into the water, startled, and expecting to see that Iason had brought a charge wand into the bath.

"What's wrong?" Iason asked, concerned and reached for Riki. "What happened?"

Riki gaped at him. That? What was that? What the hell was that? He rubbed at his lips, found his hand was trembling.

Iason moved forward. "Riki? What is wrong?"

"N...nothing." He rose, startled to find his legs were less than steady as he climbed out of the pool. "I...I'm just....it's too wet here." He almost stumbled on the tile as he grabbed a towel, wrapped it around him and stepped back into the bedroom.

Iason rose, stared after Riki, perplexed. "What in the world?"

Riki dropped to his knees the moment he was back in the bathroom, struggling for breath as his chest tightened. Fear? Panic? Arousal? What in the name of fuck was that? He heard Iason coming and managed to get himself upright and to the bed, crawling back between the sheets and turning on his side, away from the washroom entrance.

He felt the bed depress with Iason's weight, and then a cool hand touched his shoulder.

"Riki?"

“I...I don’t feel well.”

It wasn’t a complete lie, he really wasn’t feeling quite himself and he still had no idea what had happened or what this...this weird feeling was in his chest and stomach. His earlier arousal had completely faded, all thoughts of sex had fled in the aftermath of...of...whatever that was.

“Poor pet.” Iason soothed a hand over Riki’s hair. “It is probably just the after affects of the liqueur, it will pass soon.”

“Yeah.”

Iason bent, kissed Riki’s cheek then rose again. “I’ll have Cal bring something to settle your stomach.”

“Wait.”

“Yes, pet?”

Riki turned to him. “Let’s just lay here for awhile, until it passes.”

Iason paused, as if startled by the request, then crawled in beside Riki and pulled the younger man into his arms. “All right.”

Riki settled against him because, at that moment, he just needed to be held; even if it was by Iason. “How...was your trip?”

“Busy. I was able to accomplish quite a lot.” Iason stroked Riki’s hair. “How was your week?”

“Quiet.”

“I see. And you didn’t miss me at all?”

“No.”

Iason smiled. “Of course not. Well, I won’t need to go away again for awhile, I should think.”

“Hmmm...” Riki was starting to drift and ignored the small spike of relief that speared through him at Iason’s words. “So...you’re here all day then?”

“I am, yes. Was there anything you wanted to do?”

“Sleep. Just...sleep.”

“And after we sleep?”

Riki’s eyes fluttered closed. “Other...things.”

Iason nodded and felt Riki’s body slowly go limp as his pet fell into a deep sleep. He lay there, holding Riki and caressing his hair as he tried to understand what had frightened his pet so badly in the bath. It was possible that it was just as he said, that he’d suddenly felt ill, but Iason believed it was too sudden to be the real reason. Riki had actually lost all color in his complexion when he had wrenched himself backwards. Iason couldn’t fathom what had caused it.

“I...I can’t fucking do this anymore. Iason, please...” Riki gripped Iason’s shirt. “Get me out of Eos! If I’m going to die a slave, let me die in the underworld. Outside!”

It had been almost two weeks since Iason had taken Riki’s outburst in the medical center to heart and had driven him to meet with Katze. He explained that Riki would be working for the black market dealer again, to give him a sense of freedom and to get him out of Eos, but there were still restrictions. Riki was still a pet and he was still on a leash, even if it was an invisible one. He would earn a pay cheque, which would really just be pocket money, as Iason would still provide for his basic needs, but no one other than Katze would know about Riki being the pet of a Blondie.

Basic needs, according to Iason Mink, included a luxurious and spacious, split level, two bedroom apartment in Apathia. It was not as extravagant as the condo in Eos, but it still had to be befitting of a Blondie for when Iason chose to visit, and so the parlour, kitchen and the master bedroom had been decorated to his tastes. He provided a credit account for Riki to furnish the rest to his liking, allowing his pet to make the place his own, in some areas at least.

The problem was that Riki didn't want to use Iason's money, and he also didn't really know the first thing about decorating. Katze had finally convinced his new employee to put some more furniture in the damn thing, for no other reason than to stop it echoing so badly when they spoke.

After Riki received his first 'official' pay check, and along with his winnings from the casino a few weeks before, he purchased a plain, single bed, sheets and blankets, a small bureau, and a desk to house his laptop for when Katze gave him work to bring home. It was in this room that he slept, instead of the master bedroom with its massive bed and silk sheets.

The smaller room reminded Riki of his apartment in Ceres and despite the perverseness of having such incredibly plain furnishings among the truly grand trappings Iason had ordered, it gave Riki both a feeling of independence and served as a reminder to who and what he really was.

Riki entered his new, eerily quiet apartment, removed his boots and coat, then crossed the large, furnished living, and stepped up into the kitchen. He pulled out a package of instant noodles and put the kettle on to boil the water.

It had taken him a few days to adjust to the fact that he was now responsible for getting himself up in the mornings, purchasing his own groceries and supplies and doing his own laundry and cleaning.

There was no Cal to provide this resource in his new place and it irritated him no end at how accustomed he had come to the furniture's assistance. Of course, the laundry and cleaning wasn't a big thing because that had been his job when he lived in Ceres as Guy always did the cooking and wash up.

Although, he wasn't overly pleased at having to cook for himself now, it wasn't that terrible a hardship as he simply purchased pre-made or instant food packages. However he found such food always left a distasteful

flavour in his mouth. Despite feeling like a prisoner in Iason's home, he realized that he had been spoiled by the fabulous, rich and nutritious food in Eos. Guy had always been the one to cook in the apartment in Ceres, and it irked Riki that he'd become even remotely dependent on anyone, first on Guy, then on Cal, to provide his food for so long. He still found himself calling out for Cal now and again, then was immediately filled with anger and self loathing for allowing himself to get used to such ridiculous treatment. Hadn't he constantly fought against it, constantly demanded to be left alone to wipe his own ass and do his own thing?

When Iason had set him free the first time he had cried for two whole days, then had gone several more days afraid to step outside; afraid Iason was mocking him and would be waiting, or that he would meet with a fate even worse than what he had suffered with Iason. He slept or smoked almost constantly, partially waiting to see if anyone would stop him. Eventually, he became self sufficient again because he had to, and because at the time he was still fighting against everything that had happened to him.

This time felt different. Rather than the overwhelming rage and disgust that had filled him for that full year, preventing him from really enjoying his time back with his old gang, here he was more or less resigned to his fate. This time he understood the reality of what his life was. He still wasn't thrilled or happy about it, but he didn't throw a tantrum over every small thing anymore and there wasn't as much anger boiling inside.

He had never expected to see Iason again after that first time he'd been released, and admittedly had been devastated when Iason showed up and demanded his return, proving that his year in the slums hadn't really been freedom. It had proven that Riki no longer belonged with Bison, or in the slums, and the only thing holding him there then was Guy.

Even though he had made the conscious choice to leave Guy behind when he went to work for Katze, and he spent so much time wanting to get back home, to Guy during the years he had been Iason's captive, it was ironic that upon his return home he found it impossible to be with his former paring partner the way they had before. Iason had made that impossible as well.

He had hurt his friend and former lover by leaving, had hurt him further by returning to Ceres then denying Guy the right to touch him, to love him. Guy didn't know what had happened to him and Riki had been too ashamed to admit to it. He didn't deserve Guy's love, or his touch or anything his friend offered. He was dirty, useless. Nothing but a pet and he could not get beyond that state of thinking to allow Guy back into his heart.

Iason had used his love for Guy against him, had forced him to sever all ties Riki had to his old life and Riki still resented him for that. He'd been given a choice, a choice that was often given in the slums; and instead of choosing self preservation; as he would have any other time, Riki had chosen to save his friends and return to Iason. He had never been a child, not really, but that choice had shoved him full force into adulthood, forcing him to face his reality for the first time, without any misconceptions.

Now, here he was free again, more or less, but this time it was different. While there were still limits to what he could do here, and where he could go, he was still subject to Iason's will. Katze kept a close eye on him, but he didn't really mind that. He liked Katze, and it was still better than being holed up in that damn condo in Eos, or having to face the hatred and condescension of that city any time he left the apartment.

Here, no one knew who he was, he could walk around without being glared at or talked about. He could sit in his apartment and do whatever he felt like doing, smoke to his heart's content; although the stipulation was still that he had to smoke on the balcony outside as Iason did not want the apartment to reek of smoke.

He could go to a bar or a club, but only if Katze accompanied him; and at least he didn't have to be collared as he had in Tanagura. Here no one knew he was a pet and so when he and Katze went out, they just looked like two friends hanging together and it gave Riki a good feeling. It gave him a very small sense of normalcy and helped ease the pain of losing his gang.

The shrill whistle of the kettle brought Riki out of his thoughts and he poured the hot water over the noodles. He grabbed a fork, the noodles and a bottle of sake, then returned to the living area and dropped down on the cream and soft blue sofa that Iason had chosen. He propped his feet on the

glass coffee table and slouched into a more comfortable position against the cushions.

As he ate, he wondered again about what Katze had told him earlier, about the risks that Iason was taking in order to provide this little excursion of freedom for him. He knew he sometimes caused Iason trouble, had the memories of punishments to prove it, but the Blondie never seemed the least concerned about it otherwise.

He didn't understand what the risks were? He belonged to Iason, wasn't it up to his master to do whatever he wanted with him? Why would that constitute a risk? The idea that Iason could be putting his standing in Tanagura, or even himself physically in jeopardy worried Riki for some reason.

Possibly it was just a nagging worry that if something happened to Iason, he could end up being sold to a brothel or a Blondie even worse than Iason, but Riki was honest enough with himself to admit there was more to it than that. He hated Iason, there was no doubt about that, and often wished he had the strength to really hurt the Blondie, as he had been hurt. And yet, the idea of someone hurting Iason, physically calling him pain, bothered Riki, and he couldn't fathom why.

Riki was aware of the pet laws, they had been one of the first things that he'd been forced to learn in the beginning; well after the first three months of intense seclusion and horrific conditioning. The first time Iason took him physically, he had assumed that all masters did this with their pets, but he had found out later that he was the exception and that Blondies never participated in sexual activity. They got off on watching others fornicate, or occasionally playing with their pets, but actual sex was never involved.

It seemed he had been the exception for so many things, now that he thought about it. Was that the cause of the derision he suffered from everyone else? He was a slum mongrel, almost unheard of for a pet. His pet ring was unlike any other pets, and he did not participate in soirees unless the issue was forced by other Blondies. He ate at the table with Iason, they slept in the same bed almost every night and no one else was permitted to touch him, other than Iason.

He had never even been in a breeding party, which was standard for pets. Even the recent request from Diman had been refused. When he thought about it, he was probably the only pet in Tanagura that hadn't been paired off, at least once. Iason was the only one he had sex with, the only one that saw him naked, except for a handful of instances early on; not including furniture.

Had Iason chosen to withhold him from breeding with others because he sensed that Riki would be too humiliated, or was it because Iason could not stomach the idea of anyone else touching his pet? The first really didn't make sense, as Iason always insisted that a pet had no need for shame or humiliation, so it had to be the other didn't it?

Iason was insanely jealous of anyone touching him, even Riki knew that, but he never really thought about why. It couldn't be normal for a master to be so possessive of a pet, not with what he saw other masters do with their pets, so then what did it mean that Iason was so jealous?

He didn't really act like a pet, not perfectly, and it seemed, on closer inspection, Iason did not act like a traditional master either. Yes he could be brutal and was quick to anger, but overall, Iason was kind and generous. He had always thought that was the norm as well, until he saw other Blondies with their pets, and realized that Iason, again despite the past punishments, was quite forgiving of Riki's behaviour and allowed far more concessions than what other pets received.

Their time at the beach house had been a surprising change from their usual routine. He'd really enjoyed their time there; Iason had seemed like an entirely different person, well until the whole thing with Mimea happened. Riki had noticed a look of pride on his master's face when he showed him how much money he had won in the casino, and he found that receiving such a look from the usually stoic Blondie had given him a silent thrill; it had made him want to do something else to receive that look again. Did that mean he really was becoming a pet, so eager to please his master?

Iason had stolen him from his life, taken away all his choices, forced him to do unspeakable things, and yet...and yet...The Blondie was taking a risk to give Riki this little piece of freedom. He'd had to jump through hoops when

he first returned to Tanagura, so was that also because Iason had gotten in trouble by letting him go the first time?

And why had Iason let him go, just to prove again that no matter where Riki went he still belonged to Iason, or...or did the Blondie sense that Riki truly was so near the edge he allowed such a choice so he could to gain some relief from his bonds? Did Iason take his request seriously because he was trying to make him feel better, trying to ease his suffering? Did Iason even care when he suffered? It didn't always seem so, especially when he was being tormented in bed.

With a sigh, Riki finished off his noodles and his bottle, returned to the kitchen to toss the carton and grabbed another bottle of sake. He walked to the balcony doors, but instead of stepping outside he simply opened them, then returned to the sofa and lit a cigarette, deliberately ignoring Iason's rule of smoking in the apartment. Oh yeah, there was still some rebellion left in him. He inhaled deeply, tipped his head back and smiled as he breathed out the smoke in a slow, sensuous trail to rise above his head.

"And a lovely sweet fuck to you, Iason Mink," he smirked.

Why would Iason do any of this? Why not just keep him chained and submissive as he had in the beginning? Why wasn't he fighting against Iason as he once had? Because of the sex, the conditioning? Was it fear that kept him with Iason? The fear that if he tried to leave again, acted up again that Iason would hurt his friends?

No. If Riki was honest with himself he could admit that part of him, a very small part, was relieved when Iason had come to Ceres to take him back. Yes, he had been afraid, of course he had, he hadn't wanted to give up his freedom again, but part of his fear stemmed from the relief of seeing Iason again, the need that had instantly hit him and the conflicting emotions that had swarmed him at that moment. He had been incapable of fighting off Iason's touch, had responded almost immediately the way he had been trained to and had been sickened by it. And yet...and yet....

That first night when he returned to Eos and found himself back in Iason's arms had been....bliss. Iason had been uncharacteristically gentle and kind,

providing easy and lazy relief, after thrilling and mind-numbing pleasure. He hadn't tormented Riki for hours as he had in the past, well they had done it for hours, but there was no urgency, no denial of pleasure. Iason allowed him to come as many times as he wanted to, had taken him slowly, gently, over and over again to the point that Riki could no longer form coherent thought.

Despite his fear and anger, Riki felt a sense of completeness that he had never felt before; it was like coming home, but not to any home he had ever known. He had agonized for weeks over those feelings, and what they had meant, then he chose to deny and forget about them because he could find no reason for it.

Until that kiss, three weeks ago in the washroom, and mixed with the memories of their dancing on the balcony, Riki knew he was in trouble. Even though he had been drunk, he still remembered portions of what happened that night, and then the kiss in the bath...The kiss that had been so...so perfect and good and...right. It had scared him to feel that way about Iason, terrified him to have that kind of affection towards his master.

It had been almost two weeks since he started working for Katze and he was surprised to find himself feeling incredibly lonely. Even though Iason showed up every other day the first week he had been here, he's only come once this week, and that was four days ago. It felt odd not having him there all the time. No Cal, no Iason. Did he miss them? Well, his body certainly missed Iason's touch, his stomach missed Cal's cooking, but that didn't mean he actually wanted to be back in Eos, did it?

Despite the occasional need that arose in him, Riki refused to find release by his own hands, just as he had refused to do so during his year in Ceres. It could have been a product of his conditioning, or the fact that he felt disgust that he needed to think about Iason to get aroused, but in all honesty, it was simply that if the Blondie wasn't there to touch him Riki didn't want it.

Iason had finally given him what he wanted, or at least partially. He was living alone, away from Eos, was working and earning his way, mostly. He felt useful again, less restricted and yet...and yet instead of going out every night with Katze and enjoying his newfound freedom he usually came right

home after work, expecting, wanting Iason to be here to greet him, to hold him and to take him to bed.

“Ah, fuck it.”

Taking a long swallow of sake, he rose and stepped out onto the balcony, inhaled deeply from his cigarette, then stared out over the city. It was a different view from Eos, not as bright or as glittering, but it held the same disinterest for him.

Glancing at his watch he realized this was usually the time that Iason would be coming home, and within two minutes of his arrival the Blondie would be stepping out onto the balcony with him. Riki stared at the doors behind him, as if willing Iason to appear, then turned back to the city again.

He missed Iason. Never would he have thought such a thing would happen, but it was the truth. He missed the feel of Iason’s arms curled around him as they slept, missed the Blondie’s fingers tickling through his hair as they sat on the sofa and read. Was Iason angry with him? How long was he going to wait before coming to see him and what kind of mood would he be in when he did come?

He wondered about what Katze said regarding Iason taking risks. Had something happened to Iason? Had those risks somehow caused him more trouble? Had he been hurt? He forced himself to calm down. No, if anything like that had happened Katze would have contacted him. Besides, Iason would not be taken easily by anyone. He could handle himself.

He heard a sound behind him, turned to watch the door open and a tall Blondie walk through. Riki smiled, tossed his cigarette and had started to run to Iason, before he caught himself and stopped in the middle of the living room.

“You’re here.”

Iason nodded and moved to embrace Riki. “I am.” He sighed heavily. “I am sorry for not coming sooner. Did you miss me?”

“No.”

“That’s a shame.” Iason smiled and started to pull Riki towards the bedroom. “Let me show you how much I missed you, then.”

Riki followed obediently as his heart sped up.

Chapter 12

Even the pets in Eos who are aloof and patronizing grow old and lose their master's interest.

Riki could feel Iason's mouth on him, on his neck, his chest, his nipples as Katze's words from earlier drifted back to him. He was just beginning to recover from the first round of sex, and now Iason seemed intent on taking his time, but the slow deliberation also gave Riki a chance to think. Whenever he closed his eyes he could still see the pets being beaten at the warehouse, pets that had held a high standing in Eos and had believed they were better than he was being treated like less than slum mongrels. It left a bad tasted in his mouth to see them treated that way.

His body was responding to Iason, as it had been trained to do, but his mind was elsewhere and he couldn't seem to get it back into the moment. He hadn't separated himself from Iason's touch like this in years and it annoyed him a little that he was doing it now

As if sensing his pet's distance Iason stopped and looked down at him, turning Riki's face to his. "What is it?"

Riki blinked up at him, an apology in his eyes, along with a trace of unease. Would Iason punish him for being distracted? Did it even matter what he was thinking as long as his body kept responding? Iason's touch was always so good, even if he did go to extreme at times, it was always so very good, and those four days had seemed like four weeks.

The only thing left is to fall from one whorehouse to the next until you get to hell.

Panic had him wrapping his arms around Iason's neck and pulling the Blondie down to him for a kiss. He didn't want that, he didn't want that fate. There were many things he could handle, many things he knew that he could be subjected to and survive, but that was not one of them. If Iason ever tired of him, ever threw him away or sold him, what would be the point of living?

Iason was a hard captor, a cruel one at times, but being touched or fucked by anyone other than Iason scared the shit out of Riki. He would never concede that Iason was his master, but he didn't want to be passed around the brothels until he died of disease, exposure or exhaustion.

"Riki?" Iason caressed Riki's hair soothingly when their kiss broke. "Has something upset you?"

"Riki, have you ever thought how lucky you are to be here? How much of a risk Iason is taking behind all this?"

"I....Can I...?" Riki began timidly and reached between them to touch Iason, something he had never done before. Something he had no permission to do. He snatched his hand back as Iason stiffened in surprise. "I...I'm sorry I..."

He wanted to do something for Iason, other than be a sexual outlet for him. Katze was right, Iason was taking a huge risk for letting him work and stay in Apatia.

Iason rolled off of Riki, sat up slightly and watched his pet curiously. "Do as you like, Riki." The mongrel had never offered to touch him without an order before, had never taken even the slightest incentive during sex.

Slowly, hesitantly, Riki slid over, glanced up at Iason questioningly, and then took Iason's member into his mouth.

Iason gently ran his fingers through Riki's hair and watched with fascination as Riki licked and sucked him, slowly at first, and then with more vigor. The mongrel could not take Iason all the way inside his mouth, the Blondie's attachment was simply too large, but he did take most of it. Iason felt enormous pleasure from what Riki was doing, he knew it would not be enough to make him orgasm, but it did feel incredibly good. He wondered what had motivated his pet to make such a bold move, and then decided it didn't matter and concentrated on the sight of Riki's head bobbing up and down on his cock, his hot moist mouth engulfing him, lathering him as his hand jockeyed with position at the base, stroking even as he sucked.

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Riki liked the taste of Iason, it was different than Guy and not at all what he has expected. Granted there was human flash over whatever substance the android was made of, but it wasn't as rigid as he thought it would be and it didn't taste like metal or anything odd like that. It had a cool taste, almost minty, and there was no release of fluid, like what came out of his own, but perhaps Blondie's didn't actually have sperm so that made sense. They could have an orgasm, he had witnessed that, but there would be little point in having actual procreative abilities.

Closing his eyes he put his attention back to making Iason feel good, even though he didn't quite understand why he felt the need to do so. He could feel Iason's fingers in his hair, gripping tightly, then soft, tight, then soft again, but that was really the only response he had. Iason didn't moan or sigh or become breathless like a human did when aroused, his face remained neutral, his body did not sweat or lather with the excitement of sex. Riki had no idea if Iason was even enjoying it, other than the fact that the Blondie's member had grown thicker inside his mouth.

He felt Iason lean forward and then a pair of fingers teased at his anus and he bucked slightly, he was already rock hard, but did not want to stop what he was doing. When he was suddenly hauled upwards, Riki gasped for about three seconds in surprise before he was impaled on his master's tool. He cried out, because Iason had only given him a basic preparation so it hurt.

"That was very enjoyable, Riki," Iason offered softly as he started to thrust. "You did a very good job."

"Ahh!...I..Iason...hurts..."

"I know, but you have only yourself to blame." Iason took Riki's nipple into his mouth as he reached between them and fondled his pet's hardened member. "I will make it quick."

Riki lost himself to the sounds and feels of Iason Mink, his pain became pleasure, his cries became sobs and always Iason touched him, everywhere, all over, leaving hot burning marks across his body.

When it was over, Iason pulled Riki close against his body, one palm against Riki's pounding heart as his pet fought for breath. Riki had one hand limply on the pillow over his head, the other gripped the arm that Iason had slung over his hips.

"What were you thinking of, Riki?" he asked softly, enjoying the sight and feel of his panting mongrel. "Did something happen at work?"

Riki curled forward, hiding his face in the crook of his arm, Iason lessened his hold but did not release him completely. How could he be expected to talk after that? "I...I just..." He just had a moment of intense gratitude towards Iason for not treating him like the other pets.

He realized now, thanks to Katze, that while his life was not as easy as the other pets who were often fawned over by their owners, he had far more security than they could ever hope to have. He had a master who wanted him and would do almost anything to keep him. Yes, Riki wanted to be free, but if he couldn't be, at least he no longer worried that Iason would toss him to the wolves or dispose of him as so many other masters did with their pets.

It hit him, then, hard, that Iason really might never release him. "You're keeping me," he murmured; it was not a question.

Iason tilted his head, puzzled. "Of course." He leaned down, nuzzled Riki's neck. "You are mine, Riki. You belong to me."

"F...For how long?"

"Forever."

Tears filled Riki's eyes, both in relief that Iason would not throw him into some brothel, and also in grief that he would never again be free. Iason didn't lie he didn't need to, and so he knew then that he would always be a pet. He no longer felt rage at the idea, only sadness for the life he could have had.

"O...Okay."

"Oh, Riki." While there was no promise in Riki's voice that he had accepted his fate, there was a tickle of submission that pleased Iason. "You are my pet, now and always. I will never allow anyone else to have you."

"I...know." He did now anyway. Riki knew with certainty that Iason would never let him go, never let anyone else touch him and it offered him some measure of comfort. He would never end up like pets he had seen today.

Iason gently laid Riki on his back and moved over him. "So sad," he sighed as he slowly moved downwards, kissing Riki's body as he went and getting an instant response. "I don't wish you to be sad, Riki. I'll make you forget your troubles."

The problem with that, was that Iason Mink was his biggest trouble. Riki's body arched as Iason's mouth closed over him, his hips rose of their own volition towards that hot, moist entrance.

"I...missed you," he whispered, so quietly he was sure that not even the android would have heard him.

Iason's piercing blue eyes watched his pet's face contort in pleasure as he gave Riki the same pleasures that had been offered to him earlier. He was further pleased when Riki's fingers trailed subconsciously over the, long blond hair that spilled across his stomach; he soothed, coiled and rolled the locks between his fingers.

Iason deliberately adjusted his position so that more of his hair was within Riki's reach and the mongrel's hands responded greedily as his breaths came in hard, needy gasps. Iason kept his place slow and steady, causing

Riki's orgasm to build slowly but intensely, until finally his body rose in a painfully unnatural arch as he released in Iason's mouth.

Iason crawled up over his pet, kissed him. "I missed you too," he murmured, even as he gently rolled the limp body beneath him onto his stomach. "You are mine, Riki. Forever." He entered Riki's body, heard his pet gasp at their joining and then murmur a plea to stop. He lowered his lips to Riki's ear and whispered. "Not yet. It's not enough."

Riki tensed at the familiar words, it was rarely enough for Iason Mink, but then his thoughts were blown from his body as Iason started to move. Over and over again, pleasure and pain, relief and regret, joy and sadness, it all became mixed and jumbled in his mind, his heart and especially his body.

Was this love, he wondered? He had never believed in such an emotion before. He had cared about Guy, about his friends at Bison, but he knew he had never loved any of them, not that way. There were poems about the atrocities love could cause, songs about how it could bring you such tears and yet such happiness. Was that what he was feeling for Iason?

He wanted to be free, but he was terrified that Iason would one day not want him. He hated being a pet, but he craved his master's touch. A pet was the lowest form of scum, and yet Iason made him feel treasured. Even when Iason wasn't near he was thinking about him. He hated him, hated the things Iason had done to him, but the idea of him being hurt caused a sharp pain in his chest.

Was this love and if it was, how would he ever survive it?

Chapter 13

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki remembers a time before Iason Mink

Notes for the Chapter:

The first part of this chapter, I thought I would explore a little more about Riki's past, just a few highlights, so I hope you will indulge me. AS always if you are enjoying this story, please, please review! I promise to be your pet if you do! ;-)

I am completely skipping over Dana Burn because I hated watching Riki suffer and both of them die, but for those that are unfamiliar with the story: Guy kidnapped Riki to free him from Iason, castrated Riki to remove the pet ring, then blew up the place while Riki, Iason and Riki were all still inside. Iason was injured while making their escape, Riki got Guy out then went back with the intention of dying with his master.

In this story they don't die. (thank Jupiter!)

Riki peeked through the railings of the third floor landing as an imposingly tall man with long flowing black hair spoke with the administrator, a balding, fat man that enjoyed fondling those under his charge and beating the ones who resisted. Thus far, he had never gotten his hands on Riki, who was smart enough, even at ten, to never be alone with a pervert.

The tall man was an Onyx of Tanagura, Riki had seen him come here several times, and that was the title that the older kids had given him. Below him, money changed hands, and they moved further down the hall to a classroom door on the left.

The administrator stepped into the classroom, then a few minutes later a small crowd of six-year-olds stepped forward, all pale and mostly blond, although there were a few with brown hair. None of them had dark hair or skin like Riki's, but then he was considered an anomaly here. Riki the Dark they called him and he hated that name.

He had no origin, no idea where he came from, his earliest memories were this Godforsaken place, and the unkind hands of people prodding him, sticking things in him. He never knew his mother or his father, had no idea if he had siblings. He was simply an orphan, without proper name, place or identity.

The children followed the Onyx to the front doors, which were quickly released by security. Soon they had all disappeared, and the administrator returned to his office. Two minutes later, a teacher escorted a young boy, about Riki's age, into the office and opened the door.

"Bastard," Riki muttered as he watched the boy step inside the office and the teacher walk away. "Dirty old man."

He sighed, sat back against the wall and pulled out the pocket knife he had stolen from a shop some time ago. He had to be in this hell-hole for three more years; all the boys got kicked at fifteen, unless they were females, who were allowed to stay until they were eighteen and by then they would already have a pairing partner lined up so would not be living on the streets. Females were rare in Ceres, so they were treated especially well.

There were three ways to get out of Guardian, being kicked out at fifteen, being picked up as a worker or apprentice or by some socialite in Midas, or in a body bag. The forth way, the way few even considered, was to run. The administration didn't really care if a kid ran away, they knew that the kid's chances on the streets of Ceres were slim to none, and they could always use the vacant bed.

Slim chance or not, Riki made up his mind not to stay here a day longer than his thirteenth birthday; not that he knew when his birthday was, he simply used the calendar year to decide. He wasn't even sure if he was ten,

to be honest, but the teachers claimed he was so he had to take them at their word.

He thought of the Onyx and those group of youngsters, wondered where they could possibly be going. It wasn't the first time he'd seen young kids leave in a group like that, but they never returned and he had long stopped caring what became of them. Perhaps there was another way to leave Guardian, but the Onyx gave him a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach and he knew he would never chose that way, he didn't even want to know what that way was.

Oh well, three more years of sleeping with one eye open, fighting for every scrap of food and clothing one could get here. They were served regular meals, if you could call the small packets of instant noodles and substitute meat food, but then they were sent on their way to eat. They were never allowed to stay in the small cafeteria; and so of course the older boys would try and steal your food the minute you were away from the staff.

Riki learned quickly, after several beatings and even going days without food, how to avoid that. He would quickly rip open the packet as soon as he got it and gobble it down as he slowly made his way out of the cafeteria. He didn't bother to try and heat it in the machines in the hall, he'd just eat it cold and uncooked, but he didn't care, food was food and it was better than going to bed on an empty stomach.

At first the bigger boys still beat on him, for not having a share to contribute, but after awhile they stopped. He always fought back, always, and it didn't matter if it made them hurt him worse, he would not just lie down and take it. He had nothing of his own except his anger and his pride and he would never give either of those things up.

After being molested multiple times, beaten, tossed around, starved, tormented and abused before he was seven, Riki had suffered through and learned the ways to avoid such situations; and when they couldn't be avoided he fought. Once he was free of this place, no one he would fight and he would chose. No one would ever tell him what to do again. No one would ever touch him without his permission or take from him what belonged to him.

There was actually a lot of ways to beat the system of constant neglect and abuse if you bothered to pay attention, and that was one thing he was very good at. The people here made you feel filthy and useless, because you had to rely on their services and good will to survive. Riki had promised himself that once he was out of here, he would never rely on anyone, he would never owe anyone ever again.

He learned the rules of Guardian early on. Steal what you like, but never get caught or you were severely punished. Never be alone with any adult if it at all possible and if you were, especially if it was the administrator; stick your fingers down your throat and vomit so they believed you were to sick too play with. Never believe what anyone tells you, no one here wanted to be your friend and no one ever had anything nice to show you in the bathroom or the closet or an empty classroom; it was always just a ploy to get you alone so the older kids could torment and abuse you.

The number one rule, of course, was to watch everyone and learn from it because you could never underestimate the power of information. Most took this rule to a higher level, ratting out other boys in order to earn specific privileges; to the extent that they would even make up things just to get a little more food or video time; or blackmailing kids to force them to do things they didn't want to do.

Riki wasn't a rat, he never even gave up the kids that beat on him regularly, or stole from him in the beginning. He wasn't here to make enemies, but nor was he here to make friends. Blackmailing him was useless, because he would simply take the punishment rather than owe anyone. He was perfectly fine on his own. He didn't need anyone, not ever

Riki's eyes drifted open and yet he couldn't see anything. Oh God! He was blind! Not this! Anything but this. He could handle anything as long as he could see it coming. Help me! Someone please help me! I can't see! I can't see! Iason! Cal! Anyone, please! Oh God! Oh God! I can't see!

Suddenly, a calm settled over him and he drifted off again.

"Hey, you're a pretty one."

"Leave me alone!" a small, brown haired boy cried as he tried to pull away from the larger youth who had hold of him. "Let me go!"

Someone kicked the boy in the back and he fell forward in the dirt.

Riki sipped the juice he had stolen from the store and watched as the three teenagers surrounded a kid that had wandered into the park area. He'd seen the boy around a few times before, and he really was a pretty. Long, dark hair the color of rich leather fell in a cascade around his pale, face, wild and untamed. Round, defiant eyes that were neither blue nor green, but a soft mixture of both, that always seemed to be searching for something.

The pretty boys were always the first ones to be raped, that's why Riki made sure that no one ever thought of him as pretty. He'd had to suffer through being fondled when he was a youngster, or used to suck off a filthy pervert, but the first guy to rape him had also been the last, and at the tender age of thirteen he already had quite a reputation.

There weren't many people in the park this late in the evening, most knew to avoid it due to situations just like these, so it was really the kid's own fault that he was being attacked. He'd learn, Riki thought, one way or the other everyone always learned from their mistakes.

The boy cried out as his shirt was ripped from his body, clothing was precious in the slums, not everyone could afford replacements and Riki felt a tinge of sympathy for that more than the fact that the kid was about to be gang-banged by men twice his age.

"Fuck you!" the boy cried as he was held down. "Let me go! Let me go, you bastards!"

Already tired of the familiar scene, Riki finished his drink, slid off the rotting picnic table where he had been seated, and that was when the kid looked at him with wide, fearful eyes through a sea of arms and legs.

"Help me!" he cried as the others laughed around him. "Please, Riki!"

Riki stiffened, surprised the kid knew his name, then he heard the sound of a leather belt hitting flesh and his fist tightened on his bottle. It was a sound he was familiar with, a sound he had heard before, thanks to a certain teacher at Guardian; and even now the memory of the sting such a weapon could leave on your flesh caused him to flinch.

Shit. Shit! He shouldn't get involved! The only person he could count on was himself, the only person he needed to worry about was himself.

A cry pierced the air, then another loud snap of the belt.

"Motherfucker!" he growled as he curled his fingers around the top of his bottle and slammed it against the table.

"Stop your whining! Ain't no one gonna help you, ya stupid shit!" The leader of the group sneered as he rolled the struggling kid over on his stomach and pulled his pants down. "You might even enjoy it and...urk!"

The sound of their leader's sudden silence caused the other three to glance at him and they saw a menacing dark-haired youth, with eyes of pitch black, holding the jagged edge of a bottle against the kneeling man's throat.

"Back off or he gets a second mouth," Riki warned quietly.

"D...do it!" the leader insisted and his men released the kid and scrambled to their feet.

"This ain't your business, kid!" a sandy blond man spat. "You know the rules! You interfere and we'll do you next!"

"Yeah, I know the rules, but I got a thing about belts." He pressed the edged glass further against the leader's throat, until a thin line of blood trickled down. "Plus, he asked for my help, I can't just turn a blind eye."

No one had ever asked him for help before, no one ever asked him for anything, or he them, that was just how it was. Everyone was out for

themselves here. Still, even though he had no idea how this kid knew him, he couldn't just ignore a direct plea.

He looked down at the coiled, nearly naked boy. "Don't just lay there stupid, run."

The kid slowly got to his feet, pulled up his pants but ignored his torn shirt, then stood his ground despite the bruises, blood and amount of bare skin showing, proving he had more courage than Riki had initially thought.

"What about you?"

Courage, but apparently no brains, Riki sighed. He realized that he could probably take two of them, but not all three and if their prey was too stupid to run, then that left him at a further disadvantage. He made a decision, and before he could change his mind the words were already out.

"This kid is my pairing partner, and you also know the rules. You fuck with someone else's pairing partner and it's open season on you and your gang."

"No way he's you're pairing partner!" one of the others hissed. "You're just a kid, for fuck sake!"

"I haven't been a kid since I was five," Riki retaliated, and no truer words were spoken. You had to grow up quickly in the slums, and while he was only thirteen, he was already living on his own and supporting himself. Again he looked at the kid. "Come here."

The boy walked over to him and offered a mild gasp as Riki grabbed him around the neck with his free hand and kissed him deeply, never taking his eyes off the other two, or pulling the bottle away from their leader's throat.

"He's mine, so back off."

The leader's head was pulled back at such a sharp angle that he could do little but look up at the young face above him. When the youth turned his face downward, he saw a pair of familiar black eyes glowering down on him. "Wh...what's your name, kid?"

"Riki."

The leader swallowed hard, causing the glass to nick his skin a second time. "Riki the Dark?"

"Don't fucking call me that!"

"You...you're the one who messed up Snouser?"

Riki bent slightly and whispered in his ear. "I owed him," he whispered. "I always pay back what I owe."

The leader paled and suddenly and lifted his hands peaceably. "He's yours, we won't touch him again."

The others started to protest, but fell silent with one look from the man on his knees.

"Go ahead, leave. We're d...done here."

Riki shoved the man forward so that his friends raced to catch him, then he grabbed the kid's hand and started to run.

As their leader rose, two of the men started to give chase, but was held back by the older man's order. "Forget it. Stay away from that kid."

Riki weaved in and out of the maze-like streets, until he got to the small apartment he was renting. Having left Guardian six months ago, he now worked as a messenger around the city, communicating with one gang member to the other, arranging for drug buys, turf fights and the like. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough to pay the rent on the small one room place at the bottom edge of the city and occasionally he got perks like cigarettes, or clothing or extra food. Information was his tool and favors were money, he always managed to exploit both.

He tossed the kid inside and locked the door, then dropped the broken bottle on the floor and tried to quell his pounding heart. "Are you stupid or something?" he snapped as he flicked on the lights. "Don't you know better than to go out alone after dark?"

The kid lowered his eyes. "I...I was looking for someone."

"Yeah, and you found three someones." Riki moved over, grabbed a cloth and wet it in the sink. "Stupid idiot." He tossed the damp cloth at the kid. "Wash the blood off your face."

"Guy."

"What?"

"M...my name, it's Guy."

Riki dropped down onto his bed, he had no other furniture, the room wasn't really big enough for any. Just a bed, a very small kitchenette, bathroom that held only a tiny shower and toilet, and one shelf over his bed that held an assortment of books; the only thing he willingly spent money on because he liked to read.

"I don't care." He pulled a package of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket and lit one. "Wash up then go the fuck home."

Guy rubbed his face with the cloth, then moved to the small sink and rinsed it. He turned and stared at Riki with those wide, blue-green eyes.

"What are you waiting for? Go home."

"I...I don't have anywhere to go home to."

"That isn't my problem, get out."

Guy rushed forward, dropped to his knees by the bed. "Please let me stay, Riki! I'll do anything for you. I'll work for you, run errands, cook, clean..."

"Does this place look like it has anything to clean?" Riki shook his head and puffed on his cigarette. "I don't need you. Go away."

Guy put his hands on Riki's knees. "You don't need anything?" His hands slid forward towards the center. "Nothing at all?"

Riki shoved him back. "No, nothing."

Guy remained on the floor, slumped and looking downward. "You...said I could be your pairing partner. You...kissed me."

"That was just so they would leave you alone."

"But..." He lifted his young gaze towards Riki again. "I...I want to be. I can be a good partner. I'll do anything you ask. You don't have to feed me or take care of me, I'll do that myself and I... and I'll give my life for you, Riki."

"Why?" Riki sat forward. "How do you even know me?"

"I...I've been following you around for awhile now. You always seem so...so alone and so...sad too, but... but there's a light about you, a...a brilliance that makes it hard to look at you sometimes because you're so...bright."

Riki gaped at him. Everyone else always said the opposite, that he was angry, menacing, reserved or frightening. Riki the Dark, he hated the name but he lived up to it and he never ever had anyone accuse him of being bright.

"Did you run away from Millsview, kid?"

Guy blinked, shook his head. "No, I'm not a mental patient, Riki."

"You sure?"

Guy nodded. "I'm sorry I said all that, I just...I really need somewhere to stay and...and I know you live on your own and you're only thirteen and...I really could help you and..."

The boy's expression was so earnest and honest, but if anyone was the bright one here it was him. Riki felt a strange lightness in his chest, a softening of his heart and cursed himself for it. The kid really was pretty, but really small. He had a pale chest, waif-like stomach, enough that Riki could count each of his ribs. Needle thin arms and the legs weren't much

better. Too frail, too small and frail and stupid. He'd never last a week on the streets.

"When did you last eat?" He didn't know why he was asking, he really shouldn't give a shit, but damn the kid was skinny and Riki knew how it felt to go hungry.

"I...don't remember. A few days, maybe."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

Riki blinked in surprise. "No shit? You look younger than me!"

"I...I'm small for my age. Sorry."

"Why the fuck are you apologizing?"

"Because I...I'm pretty useless. I know that."

"Look, don't ever apologize for who or what you are, you keep doing that shit and the vultures will pick you off in a heartbeat. Never show weakness, even if you are weak, never ever show it. You fight to the very end, you got it? You don't let anyone take what's yours."

"O...okay."

With a heavy sigh Riki lay back on the bed inhaled and blew a soft ring of smoke up towards the ceiling. What was he doing? This kid was just gonna cause him grief, but if he shoved him back out onto the street he'd be no better than those assholes at Guardians. He was better than that. He was fucking better than all of them.

He supposed he could get twice the message work if he had someone else to run around with him, and another set of ears to pick up some information couldn't hurt either. He'd have to train the kid of course, show him how to be invisible, how to blend into the background. People didn't talk when they noticed you were there.

"I can't pay you anything."

"I don't want money. I just want to stay here, with you."

"We're not gonna fuck or anything. Being my pairing partner is just for show, got it?"

"Yes."

"Guy." Another smoke ring rose above him. "Okay Guy, you can stay for awhile, until I change my mind, but don't try to fucking touch me again or I'll kill you."

Guy settled on his knees by the bed. "Okay, Riki."

Riki's body was on fire, he felt like he was gagging. Something was lodged in his throat, something hard and horrible. What was happening to him? What the hell was happening to him? He could feel the object inside him moving, up out of his chest, into his throat and then, finally it was free and he could breathe. He could breathe but he still couldn't see. Iason! Iason! Was this death? Was he fated to just relieve all of his past memories and mistakes forever more?

"Motherfucker."

Guy glanced up and grinned at Riki who stepped through their small window onto the fire escape where Guy was hanging their laundry to dry. "What?"

"You fucking grew again!" When he had first met Guy, a little over a year ago, and had saved him from being raped, the boy was pencil thin and only came up to his shoulders. Now, Riki barely topped Guy's shoulders and the kid, who was actually two years older than him yet he couldn't stop thinking

of him as a kid, had managed to replace his waif-like body with one of hard, solid muscle.

He tugged hard on the tail Guy kept his hair in. "If I'd known you were gonna do this, I would have left you in the fucking park!"

"You could always cut me off at the knees if it bothers you that much," Guy offered as he hung Riki's only other shirt to the line. He turned suddenly, stepped forward causing Riki to step back as the landing was barely the size of a postage stamp. "Or, you could just keep me on your knees when I'm around you." He knelt and reached for the fastener of Riki's jeans.

"I...could do that, yeah." Riki pushed Guy's hands away. "Not out here, pervert." He smirked and climbed back through the window, watching as the taller boy followed.

Originally when he had agreed to let Guy stay with him it had been only as a temporary fix, to give the kid a break and keep him out of trouble. Riki was so used to being on his own and living alone that it was odd for him to come home to a home cooked meal and the scent of fresh laundry. Guy managed to make a meal out of any old thing he could scrounge, and it actually tasted good.

If Riki needed cigarettes Guy fetched them, if he wanted a drink, Guy fetched it. He started to use Guy as a messenger as well, and before long everyone knew that the kid worked for Riki. Guy had a strange effect on him, it was as if the light and purity inside of Guy levelled out the dark cynicism inside of him, and he found himself getting involved in more disputes and helping out more people, as he had with Guy.

Several times Riki had taken on men much older and larger than he was and he garnered a reputation as a fighter. He taught Guy to fight, so he wouldn't be constantly worried about him, and in return Guy helped build up Riki's reputation. He also taught Guy to read better, who for whatever reason, had only a minimum understanding of words.

Everyone called him Riki the Dark now, and rather than continue to fight against it, Riki embraced the name, it suited him like the dark clothes he

preferred to wear. More people came to him, asking for favors, for protection, and Guy suggested that he offer such services only if they had something to trade. Sometimes, that was smokes or booze, other times specific food items that Guy might want to use for meals.

A lot of the time, guys would offer sex as a trade for a favour, but Riki always declined. He'd had to prostitute himself a few times when he first ran away from Guardian, to pay back his own debts because he'd had nothing else to offer, but while he hated it every time, he hated owing someone even more. But now, he and Guy were better established and so he didn't have to resort to such tactics.

Most times it was return favors, which was the true currency in Ceres. When you owed someone a debt it was as good as money in the hand, and that person who owed you the debt could not refuse when the stake was called in. For Riki, he had paid his share of debts, and was now, for the first time, debt free. He owed no one, but many people owed him.

Guy suggested they expand their market and brought Riki the names of some guys he thought could be trusted. Gangs were a huge thing in the slums, if you weren't part of a gang you were nothing and got eaten up by everyone, but all the gangs were small time, constantly warring on one another, betraying one another, eating one another. Riki was tired of it, so he and Guy decided to start their own gang, and so Bison was born. It took them no time at all to rise in the ranks as the head gang in Ceres, with Riki the Dark as their leader.

Riki dropped down on the bed and Guy crawled between his legs. He hadn't really considered taking Guy as a pairing partner, he'd only said that so others would leave him alone, but the more time he spent with Guy the more he liked him. He had become Riki's first real friend, and he knew that Guy really would give his life for him, if it came to it. Guy was the first person Riki had ever trusted, ever cared about other than himself, and since everyone had started to think of Guy as his partner, Riki no longer corrected them.

They hadn't done much in regards to sex, just every now and then Guy would suck him or jerk him off, and occasionally, Riki would do the same

for Guy. It was a mutual need, mutual relief kind of situation. It wasn't like they were in love or anything.

He closed his eyes as Guy's mouth claimed him, and gently laid his hand over Guy's bobbing head. "You're...getting really...good at that."

"Why, thank you." Guy grinned up at him. "Practice does make perfect."

"Yeah, so it seems." It felt good, Riki thought as he watched his friend, his partner going down on him. Guy always looked so happy when he was doing this, so...into it. He felt himself swell inside Guy's mouth and realized that he wanted to do more. For the first time, he wanted to have sex with Guy.

"Hey?"

Guy looked up at him.

"Let's do it."

Guy released him with a quiet pop and gaped. "Do...it?"

"Yeah. You know, have sex." Riki chewed on the inside of his cheek, wondering if maybe he'd made the wrong choice.

"Okay," Guy answered and lifted up to kiss Riki. "Okay." He pushed Riki back onto the mattress, his kiss became more passionate, more fervent even as he struggled to remove his shirt.

He was being carried, he could feel strong arms around him but nothing else. He wanted to open his eyes but couldn't. There were no sounds, no smells, just the feel of being in someone's arms. Was what death was like? Was he to be riddled with memories of his past with only these brief, frighteningly barren respites? Where was Iason? Did Blondies go to the same place upon death? Did they have a soul?

Riki awoke slowly, reluctantly and immediately noticed two things; one, that he was naked and the second, that he was starving. A deliciously cool breeze was blowing across his back, causing him to shiver slightly.

“Guy,” he rasped, his voice sounded strange, even to him. “Left the window....open.”

His hands wandered across soft, silken sheets and then something impeded his motion. Looking up, he noticed his arm was attached to a tube, and the tube was attached to a clear bag of liquid on a rack above him. What the hell? He lifted his head slowly. This wasn't his bed, or his apartment. His drowsy eyes tried to focus on the expensive furniture in the room, and he slowly sat up.

The room was large and spacious, decorated in deep pastels. The walls were a soft tan and the high ceiling was the color of rich butter. Turning his face towards the breeze he saw two balcony doors standing open, a lace of white blowing gently against them from the breeze outside. As he inhaled, a familiar scent drifted towards him. Was that...the ocean?

It came back to him hard and swift. A tall, beautiful blonde... a young boy... torture... humiliation....sex...a pet! He was a pet! No! Set me free damn you! I belong to no one! Guy! Betrayal.... No...no...pain! God, so much pain! Fire, flames...darkness...Iason!

“Iason!” he croaked holding his head at the assault of memories.

Dana Burn! Guy had taken him to Dana Burn, had cut off the pet ring, had laid a trap for Iason then blew up the building. Iason, his legs, he was hurt...he'd gone back. But he had gone back, to be with him. He wouldn't let him die alone. He wouldn't...

He'd died. Hadn't he died? He'd gone back into the fire, back to Iason. He wasn't willing to let the Blondie die alone, not after Iason had saved him;

saved Guy. They'd smoked a cigarette, to let them sleep and bring death easier. So...what was he doing here?

He studied the IV in his arm again, then carefully pulled it out, wincing as the needle slid free from his skin. Slowly he sat up, started to slide his legs over the side of the bed, then noticed a familiar movement down below and ripped the sheets away from himself.

How was this possible? He'd been cut? Guy had castrated him, but now...everything was still there and...His eyes widened and he put a trembling hand against himself. There was no pet ring.

Relief and confusion engulfed him, then anger and a very small sense of sadness. Also, something else, something he'd never felt, before but he couldn't put a name to it. Iason! If he no longer wore a pet ring, did that mean Iason Mink, the man who had tormented and tortured him, who had used him as his sexual toy was dead?

Shock, disillusionment, despair and guilt hit him in horrifically suffocating waves. How could he have survived and Iason had not and why wasn't he relieved and happy about it? He was free, finally and truly free but...

"Iason," he murmured as he tried to rise and immediately dropped to the floor when his legs refused to hold him. His hands curled against the soft carpet as pain and nausea ripped through him.

He was going to be sick, oh God! He was going to be sick! Half crawling, half sliding he moved towards the open door where he could see a polished white sink, made it to the commode and was wracked with dry heaves. Fuck! There was nothing in him, nothing to come up. Shit! This was the worst!

A gentle hand suddenly placed a cool cloth against his face and he leaned into it gratefully, before weakly lifting his eyes to the face hovering above him.

"K...Katze." He threw his arms around the black market dealer, as Katze crouched beside him. "What....where..I...Iason...am I dead? What?"

“I’ll explain everything, but you shouldn’t be up yet, Riki.” Katze gently lifted Riki into his arms and brought him back to the bed, pulled the covers back over him, then poured a glass of water and helped him sip it. “Easy, go slow.”

Riki was very thirsty, and the water soothed his throat, but the minute it hit his stomach it seemed to want to come back up. Katze pulled up a small metal bowl as Riki spewed up what little he had managed to drink.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” He set the glass down and gently caught Riki’s arm.

“No,” Riki murmured and tried to pull away as Katze started to put the IV back in.

“You can’t take anything orally yet, you need this, now shut up and be still or you’ll end up ripping your vein.”

Riki complied, too weak to do much else.

“What do you remember?” Katze asked as he rose and lit a cigarette to calm his own nerves.

“Everything,” he murmured watching the curl of smoke rise above him and found, surprisingly, he had no craving for it. “I died.” He lifted obsidian eyes to Katze. “Didn’t I die?”

Katze nodded, grimly. “Technically, yes.”

“Then how?”

“I’m still not entirely sure myself, Riki. I had given up...” Katze frowned and stared at the glowing end of his cigarette as he recalled weeping for the loss of them in that hotel room where he had hauled Guy. “Anyway, something told me to go back, after the fire. I don’t know why, but it was like a voice in my head; I later found out it was Jupiter.”

Riki’s eyes widened. “Jupiter? I thought she only had a connection with the Elites?”

Katze shrugged. "Apparently not. Anyway, when I returned, after the fire had burned out, I saw that there was this..." He waved his hand trying to think of a proper term for the unbelievable sight he had seen. "Bubble I guess is the word, this weird green bubble and you and Iason were in the center of it."

Riki's eyes widened. "Iason?" He winced as if someone had suddenly stabbed him in the chance. "I meant to die with him. He shouldn't have died alone."

"He didn't."

Riki's sat up suddenly, ignoring how it made his body ache and his head swim. "W...what?"

"Iason's alive."

Alive? Alive! Iason survived? Another swarm of mixed emotions flooded Riki, relief, confusion, fear, joy, dread and excitement. Everything all mixed together so that he couldn't make out one from the other.

If Iason was alive then where was he? If Iason was alive, then he was still a pet, wasn't he? He glanced down at his lap then up again. "I...but...there's no..."

Katze nodded, guessing what Riki was confused about. "Well, the original was cut off, remember and as no one else but me and Jupiter know you two are alive; we couldn't just order another one."

Riki slumped. "So...I am still a pet." But Iason was alive! That had to count for something, right? Iason hadn't died because of what Guy had done, because of what Riki caused Guy to do. God, the guilt....the guilt over that would have been too hard to bear.

"Don't worry about it right now. You need to rest for awhile and..."

"How am I even here?" Riki insisted. "How did Jupiter save us and how..." Again he glanced down. "How is everything...b...back to what it was?"

Katze smirked. "Hey, first rule of furniture, don't ask, don't tell."

"You're not furniture anymore, you're a black market dealer."

"Same rule applies."

"Where's Iason?"

"He's here, but he's resting, as you should be."

"Is he...okay?"

"Do you really care? Don't you hate him for what he did to you?"

Riki averted his eyes, fisted his hands in the sheets. "I didn't want him to die, Katze."

Katze took pity on the confused, conflicted mongrel. "He'll be okay." He moved to the door. "Now, I'll leave you in the care of someone I can trust." He opened the door and there stood a young blond boy. "He's all yours."

"Hey Cal," Riki began and was startled when the furniture flew into his arms and started sobbing. "What...hey. Hey! It's okay." He glanced at Katze, appalled at the boy's emotional reaction. "Isn't it?"

"He's been through a lot," was the only explanation Katze would give. "He was worried about you."

Riki held the trembling boy, rocked him. "It's okay. It's okay," he assured.

Cal suddenly whipped up, wiped at his face and straightened his uniform. "I...I apologize, Master Riki, for my unruly behavior, but I...we thought you and Master Iason were dead and then...then you weren't, but...you...we weren't sure you would ever wake up and I...I was...I'm just really glad you are okay."

Riki felt a deeply ground affection rise up within him. "Sorry to worry you." He glanced towards the balcony again. "Cal, are we at the beach house again?"

Cal nodded. "Not the same as before, but we are by the ocean." He smiled then, moved toward the balcony. "I...left them open, hoping the smell of the water would get you to wake up. You seemed to love swimming, so I thought maybe you'd remember that smell and wake up. I'm so glad it worked."

Riki nodded, he didn't know what woke him up, but he was grateful for the thought. "Yeah, it sure did." His eyes grew heavy on the own accord and Cal was beside him in an instant.

"You should rest, Master..."

"No...master," Riki protested and hated that his entire body seemed to be shutting down suddenly.

"Yes, of course. Riki, you should rest." Cal pulled the sheets over him, as a mother would a child. "When you wake up I will have a nice beef broth prepared, it should go down easy as the doctor said no solids yet, but broth will be okay."

"Cal. Don't worry..."

"Oh, I'm not worried at all. You're awake now, so there is no need to worry. Oh, and I have ice cream here too! But you won't be able to have that until maybe tomorrow or the next day, but there is a lot so..."

"Thanks." Riki drowsily reached for the babbling furniture's hand. "You...take such good...care of me."

The young furniture blushed, then settled in the chair by the bed and watched his young master sleep.

Chapter 14

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki must decide if he will accept his freedom and run or if he will try to learn what is really behind Iason's offer.

When Riki woke this time thankfully felt none of the earlier disorientation or nausea, just a mild headache and a heavy sadness. The IV had been removed and he was alone in the room, but he didn't bother to call for the lights or to sit up, he just stared out towards the balcony doors, which were closed now. The sun was just starting to rise.

He had survived Dana Burn, his injuries healed, and now Iason was setting him free. He still didn't know if that freedom meant he would be sent to a brothel, or if he was actually allowed to go home; but where was home? He didn't want to go back to Ceres, there was nothing for him now, and he still couldn't trust that Iason wouldn't just call for him to come back again. He would not put the rest of Bison in danger a second time and if Guy survived and was back there...well, he did not want to ever see Guy again.

Would Iason let him stay working with Katze? Did he still have the apartment in Apatia? God! He didn't know anything for certain and it was....frightening.

After a long moment he rose, spotted a black robe draped across the bed and pulled it on. He ran his fingers through hair that was nearly to his shoulders now, and then padded over to the balcony to throw open the doors. He stepped out and the scent of the ocean hit him instantly.

Free. He was free. What did that even mean anymore? Did that mean he would never see Iason again, or feel his touch? Why wasn't he happy about that? Why wasn't he jumping for joy? Freedom was the only thing he had ever really asked Iason for, the only thing he had always been denied.

He didn't want to go back to Eos, but nor did he want to go back to Ceres. That left two options, staying here and working with Katze, if he was

allowed, or gathering enough money somehow for a shuttle off this Godforsaken planet. If he was free to run, then he'd run as far away from Iason as humanly possible.

He leaned against the railing, stared over the beach and watched the waves gently roll back and forth over the sand. What would be allowed? He couldn't stop thinking in those terms, couldn't stop being afraid of what Iason would do if he made the wrong choice. He supposed that was part of his conditioning; what else could it be?

"You're up early."

Riki didn't even bother to turn around as Katze stepped onto the balcony. "Don't talk to me, mother fucker."

Katze settled into one of the chairs, crossed one leg over the other and sighed. "Don't take your foul mood out on me, I was just following orders."

"Yeah, you're Iason's lap dog, I know all about it and you're still a mother fucker."

"I resent that." Katze retorted. "I've never fucked anyone's mother."

"Why?"

"Because I've been a eunuch since I was six."

"Not that, you asshole!" Riki winced as he remembered what Guy had done to him. "Why is Iason doing this?"

Katze's gaze held Riki's hard. "Doing what? Giving you what you asked for? I don't see the problem here."

"It's a trick. He said he would never let me go, so why now?"

"Why not?"

"Damn it, Katze! What is it? I may not be the brightest fucking tool in the shed, but I know when something is not right with him, now tell me what it

is? Is he healed? Is he going back to Tanagura? Is this something that Jupiter is forcing him to do?"

The last part made the most sense. Jupiter and their society had frowned on Riki being Iason's pet since the beginning. Was Iason being forced to give him up? But even that...Iason had broken all their rules, snubbed their interference to keep his pet, so why back down now?

"I really couldn't say."

"So she could be behind this then?"

"Why does it matter, Riki?" Katze sighed, heavily.

He'd had almost no sleep the last few weeks, trying to take care of Master and Pet, while keeping their continued existence a secret from everyone else, and maintaining his usual work on the Black market; but his nerves were wrung raw. He was only one man after all, he couldn't perform miracles, and now he was caught between some weird type of lover's spat....He really didn't have the fortitude to deal with this shit too.

"Look, another day or so and you should be well enough to leave, if that is what you want to do."

"And go where?" Riki demanded, angrily. "Where the fuck am I supposed to go?"

Katze heard more fear than anger in the mongrel's voice and wondered if Riki was afraid to leave, because Iason would come after him, or because he would never see Iason again?

"Wherever you want."

Katze rubbed his forehead, wishing he could get rid of this constant headache that had been lingering for the last few months; he wondered if it was a by-product of communication with Jupiter? Jupiter contacted him daily and it actually hurt afterwards.

Riki turned back towards the ocean. "So, I can stay and...work for you still?"

"You'd have to ask Iason..." Katze began and winced because he had fallen into Riki's trap.

"So he *is* still pulling the strings then? I wouldn't be free at all, would I?"

Katze quickly back pedaled, but showed none of the frustration or nerves he was feeling. Sneaky little prick! "I work for Iason, so it would be up to him if I kept you on."

"Why? You didn't consult with him the first time you hired me, did you?" Back before he had foolishly followed Iason on a trip to Tanagura and had been taken captive by the Blondie. "You don't screen all your employees past him, right?"

"That was different..."

"Why? You know I am good at what I do, and if I stayed working for you as a free man, you could have me do a lot more than what I was doing while I was on Iason's leash."

"You....you might still have to deal with Iason sometimes, Riki. Is that what you want?"

"If I am no longer his pet, what would it matter?"

Fucker, Katze thought as he pulled out his pack of cigarettes, then put them back again. He didn't usually smoke this early, but Riki was putting him on edge. The mongrel was far from stupid, and those fantastic instincts that had led Katze to initially hire him, was telling Riki that something was not right with this whole deal. He knew Riki would continue to work him until he got he answers he was looking for; in that way pet and master were completely alike.

"The decision is yours, Riki." He rose from the chair. "I'll speak to Iason if you want to stay working for me, beyond that you can do whatever the hell

you want to do."

"What's wrong with him, Katze?"

Riki's quiet question came just as the red-head was about to step back inside and Katze stilled. He closed his eyes, sighed. He couldn't disobey his master, but maybe he could...

"He loves you, Riki. He's doing what he thinks is best for you."

"He's a Blondie! He doesn't know what love is!"

"Oh really?" Katze turned and met Riki's furious gaze. "And you do? You're worse than he is for fuck sakes, both of you waging war against the other, refusing to given an inch while you scramble about in the dark. You're both too stubborn to open your own fucking eyes!"

Katze's words were like a knife in Riki's chest and the mongrel had no reply as he watched his friend disappear back into the house.

Riki waited until after breakfast before coercing Cal to bring him to Iason, so the young furniture led him upstairs to a large master suite. Iason was settled on the balcony, his back to them, sipping tea and reading something on a data pad; Katze stood beside him.

"Iason."

Iason didn't even look at him. "Are you all packed and ready to go?"

"That eager to get rid of me?"

"I assumed you would want to leave as soon as possible." Iason tapped the screen a few times then held it out to Katze. "That looks fine, go ahead and make the arrangements."

"Yes, master."

Iason did not turn to the glowering mongrel standing a few feet away from him, he kept his eyes on the water below. "Katze tells me you'd like to continue to work with him, I have no problems with that and you can keep the apartment in Apatia as well. It is already paid for so you need not concern yourself with rent."

"And where will you be?" Riki asked, quietly.

"I will be returning to Tanagura, of course. As yet no one is aware that I am alive, however Jupiter will make the decision to announce it and when she does I will return to Eos and my duties."

Riki's hands fisted at his side. It was all so easy for Iason, all so calculated and controlled. The Blondie obviously felt nothing about giving up his precious pet. Did he intend to get a new pet from Raoul, or perhaps kidnap some other poor unsuspecting mongrel off the streets?

"You can't do this again, Iason."

"Do what, Riki?"

Why the hell wasn't the Blondie at least turning around and facing him?
"You can't do what you did to me, to someone else. You can't capture and train another slum mongrel."

"Actually, I can, but that is none of your concern as you are free to go, Riki."

So, that was it, then. Iason decided he'd had enough of Riki and was going onto fresh, younger model. The idea of anyone else suffering through what he had was enough to make him sick, he couldn't allow that. He couldn't allow someone else's life to be ruined just for the entertainment of Iason Mink

"I'll stay."

Iason stiffened for a half a second, then relaxed again and reached for his tea. "Why would you do that?"

"I won't let you do this to someone else, Iason. You can do whatever the fuck you want to me, but you leave other people alone!"

"How very noble." Iason sipped his tea slowly, then set it back on the table. "Come here, Riki."

Riki hesitated for only a moment, then walked around the table to face his master. Iason's cold blue eyes held his firmly.

"Are you saying that you will stay with me, simply to prevent me from taking another slum mongrel as a pet?"

Riki swallowed, hard. "Yes."

"Again you show such devotion for someone you do not have any real association or ties to. Why do you do that, Riki?"

Because you're a monster and a prick and no one deserves a master like you. "What does it matter?"

"And if I were to take a pet from one of the breeders, would your offer be the same?"

No, Riki thought, he would not do the same for a bred pet, and yet he felt as if Iason was testing him. Did the Blondie want him to stay or not? The idea of one of those pretty, submissive kids crawling around Iason's feet almost made him laugh. No, that would never be enough for Iason, not anymore.

"You don't want that kind of pet," he stated boldly. "They don't do it for you, or you wouldn't have come looking for me." He saw something flare in Iason's cold blue eyes, but it was gone just as quickly.

"And what if I told you that you don't *do it* for me anymore Riki?"

Riki didn't even flinch, if anything he stood taller. "I'd know you were lying."

In the back of his mind Riki wondered if he was still capable of arousing Iason. That damage done by Guy seemed to have been repaired, but he had no idea if it actually worked.

Katze, standing on the sidelines, had to hold back his grin. He had never seen his master so wound up before and it was both frightening and entertaining as hell. The Blondie was perilously close to losing control, although he doubted anyone but he could see it.

"I am tired of your nonsense." Iason pretended to look bored and waved a hand at him. "I've given you your freedom, and require nothing else of you. Do not come to me again, unless you are prepared to remain as a pet, Riki. I will not offer you your freedom a second time."

"How is that supposed to be a threat, Iason? I've already suffered as your pet, I already am your pet, what more could you possibly do to me?"

Iason's eyes met his again. "You would be *a* pet, Riki, a proper pet without all the dalliances that I have allowed so far. You would no longer work for Katze. You would be expected to perform at the soirees, and to breed with other pets. There would be no more leniencies for that temper and foul mouth of yours. If you misbehave, you will be severely punished. If you mouth off you will be severely punished. And if you fail to amuse me at any time, I will send you off to Ranaya Ugo, and then I will find another slum mongrel to replace you. Do you understand?"

Katze and Cal physically paled at the threat; no one wanted to be sent to Ranaya Ugo, where the worst sexual deviants in Amoi lived. A pet rarely lasted a week there, and even then they were carried to the death halls with pieces missing.

Katze realized that Riki was pushing Iason too far and he hadn't crawled through filth and debris to bring back the mongrel just to see him end up like that. "Forgive him, Master, he is obviously feeling the strain of his injuries and the trauma of the incident. Cal, take Riki back..."

When Cal started to move towards Riki, the mongrel bared his teeth. "Touch me and die." Cal hesitated and Riki turned his attention back to the

elite. He took Iason's threat seriously, but he had seen a flash of something different in Iason's eyes, something akin to sadness or grief, despite the harsh words he had spoken.

“Why are you just sitting there, Iason?” he asked, suddenly.

Usually Iason would never have gone this long without touching him, to make a clear his threat or intentions he would always emphasize his points by touching Riki's body, simply because he could.

"If you want me to leave so badly, why don't you stand up here and make me leave?"

Iason simply stared at him.

"Well? Come on? You're stronger than me, faster than me, smarter than me. Stand the fuck up and make me go."

“He can't.”

Riki's gaze swung to Katze, even as Iason hissed the furniture's name in warning.

“Tell him, Iason.”

Katze had had enough. He hadn't slept properly in days, his head was pounding, his heart was breaking watching these two fight with each other and he knew that they were never going to get through this they weren't honest with one another. While a huge part of him did not want to disrespect his master, the smaller, more rebellious part was more insistent at that particular time.

"If you're giving him his freedom, tell him why."

“This is none of your concern, Katze.”

“Don't give me that shit! I pulled your ass out of that fire and I have just as much a stake in you as Riki does.”

Riki was shocked to hear Katze talk to Iason that way, and poor Cal almost fainted, in fact Riki's arm shot out to steady the boy, but it was to Iason that he directed his question. "Tell me what? What do you need to tell me?"

"Nothing." Iason became colder and his eyes narrowed dangerously. "You have your freedom, Riki, so go, before I change my mind."

"Change your mind? How do I know you won't do just that and come after me a year from now, two years from now?"

"I won't."

That hurt, and Riki wasn't sure why. "Why not, God damn it?"

"He can't walk, Riki."

"Damn you, Katze!"

Riki's eyes widened and he felt his own legs start to shake. He reached backwards for the railing to steady himself. "But...your legs are....they look fine."

"My legs were regenerated," Iason admitted. "However, there was apparently a flaw, either by accident or by Jupiter's design and they simply do not work."

Riki slowly lifted his gaze to Iason's face, and the Blondie stared coolly back at him. Iason was an android, how could an android have body parts that had been reconstructed but not work? By Jupiter's design? Was the God punishing her son for his disobedience by giving him back his body, but making him a cripple? That made no sense since Jupiter had made Riki completely whole.

Iason smirked at the horror and confusion on the mongrel's face. "So you see, Riki, I can no longer chase you or bind you to me. Therefore, you are free."

Riki stared at him, his mind and heart on a rollercoaster ride of emotion that he hadn't the strength to stop. So, was Iason trying to force him to go so that

he wouldn't see Iason as weak? Was he trying to avoid pity from a mongrel? How would Iason manage in Tanagura, with the other elites? Would he even still be considered as one of them, since he was no longer perfect?

The idea that Iason, despite all the trouble that the android had caused him, would suffer at the hands or words of others bothered Riki. This was no mere Blondie, this was Iason Mink, the Blondie and the only one who had ever managed to tame a slum mongrel. Riki would not allow him to be defeated, he would not allow Iason to become less than he was.

After several long moments, Riki straightened, his color returned and his breathing and heart rate slowed.

"Fine," he replied quietly. "Thank you, Iason, for freeing me." He saw the wound as clear as day on Iason's face before the Blondie managed to mask it. "Now that that's out of the way, Katze, why don't you give me the low down on this prick's injuries and his chances for recovery?"

Katze blinked in shock, as did Iason. "Uh...what?"

"I need to know what I'm up against," Riki replied as he walked over and crouched beside Iason's chair, placed his hands the lower portion of Iason's right leg and lifted, testing the muscle he found there. "In the slums people get hurt all the time, back and neck injuries are the worst and the most common, so I have plenty of experience with helping get people on their feet again."

"You...were you a therapist, Riki?"

"Nah, never licence, had to go to school in Midas for that kinda shit, but I picked up a few things watching others and I helped some people out in exchange for favors." He set Iason's leg down then moved to the left leg and did the same thing, gently massaged, pulled and felt his way over the Blondie's calf muscles. "It's always better to have someone owing you, then you owing someone else."

He started to straighten and Iason's gloved hand shot out to cover Riki's, he felt it tremble.

"Why, Riki?" Iason demanded as he squeezed Riki's hand hard, either to stop his own from shaking or out of anger or fear. "What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to get you on your feet, jackass." Riki met his gaze. "And then, when you're back to normal, I'll leave, just like you asked."

"I...." Iason was at a loss for words, for the first time in his life, he could not think of a response.

Riki stood, swayed because he rose too quickly and both Cal and Katze were beside him instantly.

"You've overexerted yourself, " Katze stated quietly. "You're still not completely recovered."

"Yeah, maybe so." Riki found he was suddenly sweating and actually had to cling to Katze, putting his weight against the furniture that could hold him, rather than bog down Cal with it. "Tell him to get me your files, Iason. I need to know what the doctor said about your legs."

Iason stared at Riki, then his gaze flickered to Katze and he nodded. "Give him whatever he asks for."

Katze nodded and walked Riki back to his room.

Cal remained at Iason's side and waited, still in shock over what he had just witnessed.

"Come here, Cal."

Cal moved closer and was only mildly startled when he was pulled onto Iason's lap. "Master?"

"Stay with me," Iason requested quietly as he wrapped his arms around the young boy's body and stared out at the water. "Just for a little while."

Cal adjusted his position so his legs were across Iason's, then he put his head on his master's shoulder and relaxed. Although it was usually not

permitted for a master to use furniture in such a manner, this was not the first time Iason had held him like this. It felt oddly maternal, or perhaps fraternal would be a better term. Cal did not remember his parents, so it was hard for him to imagine what this feeling was, but he liked it and it seemed to ease his master's mind; which was the ambition of any furniture.

Twice before, when Riki was still in Ceres, his master had called for him and held him. There was never anything sexual about it, Iason never attempted to arouse him or become aroused, he simply held Cal, like one would hold a puppy or a pillow.

Together they stared out at the sea, lost in their own thoughts.

Chapter 15

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki is still working through his decision to stay

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry everyone for taking so long to update, things are crazy here!!.
Hope this chapter is worth the wait and if it is (or isn't) feel free to drop me a comment and let me know. Thanks also for all the Kudos!
Makes me happy, happy, happy.

Riki stared at the skyline of Tanagura, which could just barely be seen from his perch on the cliff. Three days ago he had been given his freedom, and found out that Iason was unable to walk. He had decided to stay and help the Blondie get back on his feet.

The doctor had advised that Iason's exoskeleton was in perfect android condition, but somehow the organic tissue that overlaid his artificial body was causing problems, as if it was being rejected by his synthetic form. The doctor believed that Iason could recover, but it would be difficult as the tissue and muscle had to be repaired, and then properly worked to heal. The best way, the only way to do that, would be as Riki had thought, to exercise the muscles and incorporate several stretching therapies.

Riki was familiar with many of the doctor's suggestions, and he had fully intended to stay and help Iason recover, but for some reason when he woke up that morning, after a particularly horrible dream that was related to his previous captivity, he got dressed and bolted from the house.

He ran, pure and simple, just as he had run towards Ceres when Iason had released him well over a year ago. Running towards home, and Guy and a life he had some control over, running away from Iason, from captivity and humiliation and a growing need to be touched by a Blondie.

This time he'd had no destination in mind, he just needed to run, to get away from everything and everyone associated with Iason Mink, and the entire time he was running along the beach and then up onto the northern path right to the moment he had scaled this dangerously treacherous cliff, he'd expected Iason or Katze to appear and take him back.

It was an unreasonable fear, because Iason couldn't leave the villa on his own, but the concern there just the same. The Blondie may be unable to walk, but that did not diminish Iason's strength and need to control in Riki's eyes; he had been too well trained. He expected Iason to come after him, to take him back, as he had before, or to send someone to do it. He did not truly believe that he was free.

There was a path that led down to the cliff to a main road, which Ironically Riki had been in too much of a state to notice when he had climbed up from the other side, but occasionally he would see a car go by on that road. He considered going down, hitching a ride out of there, but where would he go?

Back to Ceres? No, he never wanted to see that place again, and he certainly wouldn't go to Tanagura or Midas. Maybe one of the outer areas, like Sasan or Ainis. They were not as desolate as the slums, but nor were they as prosperous as Tanagura or Midas. Maybe he could go to work in a shop there, as an apprentice or something; work his way up?

Who the fuck was he kidding? He had no money, no ID, he just had the clothes on his back, which weren't even his usual clothes; they were just regular blue jeans and a T-shirt. He hadn't even stopped to search for a jacket, hadn't taken anything with him, his need to flee had been too great.

Now, here he was watching as the sun slowly set over the water and shivering slightly as the evening air became cooler without the heat of the sun. He hadn't eaten anything, had taken no provisions, but he tried to ignore his cramping stomach. Having gone hungry plenty of times before, having been cold just as many times while wandering the streets of Ceres he could take it. Being Iason's pet had gotten him fed and kept him warm and off the streets, but that was really the only advantage he'd had.

He'd been gone for hours and yet no one had come after him. Did that mean he really was free? Could he trust that Iason was keeping his word this time? No, he couldn't trust it. He may not come today, or tomorrow, or in a week, but he would come eventually; just as he had the first time. It had been almost a year before Iason hunted him down and dragged him back, so he couldn't trust that Iason wouldn't do it again.

Still, Iason couldn't walk, or at least that was what he claimed. The doctor confirmed it, but he also said there was a good chance that with therapy and exercise the Blondie would be up and about again. Why then hadn't Iason already started on that? Why did it seem that Iason was fine staying a cripple?

Guilt prickled at Riki again. He'd said he would stay and help, but even now he didn't know why he had agreed to it. Iason had told Katze to give him whatever he needed, and then this morning, he just ran. Why? Why had he...No. He was free. It was the right thing to do, to run, to get away from Iason and that life, get away from being a pet.

He groaned. Then why was he still here? Why couldn't he just take his freedom and go? Why did he care whether or not Iason could walk? Why, even now, was he thinking about Iason touching him, kissing him, fucking him? He threw his head back and screamed a curse into the air.

Tears of frustration prickled his eyes. He'd been willing to die for Iason, he knew why, deep down he knew why, but he couldn't admit to it out loud. He was terrified that if he ever did whatever meager pieces of his identity he'd managed to save would shatter and be lost in the twisted and tormented world of Iason Mink.

Why hadn't they just died together? Why prolong their suffering like this? Iason had to know, had to understand that they could never be...that their relationship would never be normal; not after everything that had happened between them.

A last cigarette between the two of us. Doesn't seem a shabby way to go.

He saw Iason sitting there amongst the burning rubble and explosions with such a resigned expression on his beautiful face, until he saw Riki walking towards him; it was the first time Riki had ever seen surprise on his Master's face, surprise and then...

Riki growled at himself and shook the vision away. What was wrong with him? Seeing things that weren't there, thinking about things that could never be. Iason was an android, a Blondie of Tanagura. He didn't feel remorse, or guilt. He didn't feel sad or happy. He didn't feel...

Slowly, Riki rose and moved to the edge of the cliff, stared down at water crashing against the jagged rocks below. He'd died, or thought he was going to, but Jupiter had brought him back. He had never believed in a higher power, even Jupiter who was considered a God by some was just a powerful AI. Still, he'd been given a second chance, regardless of who provided it or why, and he wasn't at all sure of what he should do with this chance.

Finally, he realized that he couldn't go forward until he dealt with his fucked up feelings for Iason. He would go back, get the Blondie walking and then, once Iason was back to his normal controlling self, *then* Riki would walk away. Then he would spit in the android's face and leave; knowing that Iason could come after him. And if Iason did, he would deal with it, but leaving while Iason was injured seemed cowardly.

He arrived back at the villa sometime after midnight, since he had walked, instead of run this time. The house was quiet when he stepped inside, but despite the hour it was Cal who greeted him.

"Master Riki!" The furniture beamed at him, then scowled as he noticed the state of Riki's clothes and the dried blood on his hands. "What have you done?"

Riki glanced down at his hands, scrapped, bruised and he supposed they had been bleeding at one time from his climb up the cliff. "It's fine."

"Of course it isn't!" Cal insisted. "Come with me and I'll get you cleaned up."

"Cal, I..."

"Please..."

Riki noticed it then, the way Cal's eyes glistened, so that even though he was smiling, the furniture was almost on the verge of crying. "What's wrong? Has something happened to Iason?"

"No, Master Iason is fine." Cal moved forward and tentatively touched Riki's arm. "Please, let me get you cleaned up and tend to your hands."

Riki followed obediently back to his room and into the washroom. "Then why are you upset?"

Cal leaned over to start the water for the shower, then accepted Riki's filthy T-shirt as the mongrel shrugged it off. "A nice hot shower will make you feel so much better, and I'll make you some tea to warm you from the inside. It's chilly out and you weren't properly dressed, so you must be cold. We can't have you getting sick and..."

"Cal." Riki put his hand on the young boy's arm, but Cal did not turn towards him. "What's wrong?"

"You left," the boy whispered brokenly, but then quickly straightened and moved aside, keeping his back to Riki, as his voice returned to its more cheerful state. "I'll just go and get some ointment for your hands. Take as long as you like in the shower, make sure you get rid of that chill."

Riki stared at the closed door as Cal exited the washroom and felt a wave of guilt and shame wash over him. Cal had been worried about him. He remembered how the furniture had cried when he first woke up, but had given no thought to what his leaving like that would do to the boy. No doubt Cal feared being left alone with only Iason again, who would probably not be at all kind to a furniture once his pet was gone.

"Shit."

With a heavy sigh, Riki finished undressing then stepped into the steaming hot shower, he scrubbed himself clean, hissing slightly when the soap got into the cuts on his hands, but stayed in as instructed until he felt the chill leave his body.

When he stepped out, there was a robe waiting for him, which he stepped into once drying off. He opened the door and stepped out into the bedroom, where, instead of Cal, Katze waited for him. The red-head had obviously not been to bed yet, as he was still fully dressed.

"Idiot," Katze commented as Riki settled on the bed.

"Fuck off." He let Katze examine his hands, then apply ointment to the cuts and wrap a bandage around each.

"You get into a brawl?"

"No, climbed a mountain."

"Ah, of course you did." Katze rose, lit a cigarette then offered one to Riki, who accepted. "So, why'd you come back?"

Riki noticed the steaming cup of tea on the nightstand and reached for it, not because he wanted it, but because Cal had brought it for him. "I don't really know," he admitted. "I thought about staying gone, about hitching a ride to get me the hell out of here. I kept thinking someone would come after me."

"And when no one did?"

Riki shrugged. "Iason waited a full year last time."

"He's given you your freedom, Riki. You no longer have the pet ring, your pet registration has been cancelled because they think you're dead. What more proof do you need?"

"What happens when they find out I'm alive? Does the registration get reinstated?"

"Iason would have to request it, but since he has given you your freedom, I don't see why he would."

Riki sipped his tea. "I can't trust him, Katze. He...I can't believe he is really willing to let me go."

"Maybe that's because you don't really want him to let you go."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Riki snarled suddenly. "Do you have any idea of what you're saying? Do you really think I could pretend everything that bastard has done to me these past four years can be forgotten so Iason and I can ride off into the sunset?"

"I'm not saying it would be easy, but you both obviously have a connection..."

"My only connection to him was brought by force and torture. I'm conditioned to respond to him and that's all there is to it."

"Then why did you go back for him, Riki?" When Riki remained silent, Katze continued. "I was there remember? I saw how desperate you were. I remember what you said, how you wouldn't let Iason die alone. Why bother going in there when you could have been free of him?"

"Jupiter saved him so I wouldn't have been free, would I? He would have found me again and dragged me back."

"But you didn't know that. You expected him to die and you were willing to die with him. Why do that if you didn't feel something for him?"

"What are you, some head counsellor or something?" Riki demanded, stalking to the balcony and throwing open the doors to stand at the railing. "It doesn't fucking matter why I did it. Iason's alive and that's all that matters."

All that matters, hmmm? Katze followed Riki outside, slowly. "All I'm saying is if you hate him so much, if you're just going to leave once he is

up and walking anyway, why drag it out? Why bother to stay? Why should you care?"

"I owe him and I don't like owing anyone."

"*How* do you owe him?"

"He saved my life and Guy's life."

"And you sacrificed your own to be with him when you thought he was dying, so that to me wipes the debt clean."

Again Riki was silent. Katze didn't get it. It was his fault that Guy went off board. If he had just left Ceres again, without telling Guy the truth the his friend wouldn't have snapped and kidnapped him; wouldn't have tried to kill Iason. No, Dana Burn was as much his fault as it was Guy's, and he wouldn't have been able to love with himself if he had let Iason die alone after that.

"Well..." Katze tossed his cigarette over the rail. "Go see Iason before you go to bed, he was worried about you."

Riki nodded, but didn't turn back to watch the other man leave. "Worried, huh?"

Worried that Riki was not in his control, maybe. Worried that his pet had gone astray and he'd have to find a new one more like.

Still, even if Iason was worried, no one had come after him. Was that on Iason's order, or had he ordered it and Katze and Cal refused? No, neither of them would refuse Iason, so that meant that Iason had been willing to let him go; at least for now. It didn't mean that Iason wouldn't change his mind and come after him in the future, but he supposed it was enough for now.

He took one last, deep inhale, then tossed the butt over the rail and turned around. Stepping back inside, he closed the balcony doors to keep the cool evening air out, then headed upstairs. He found Iason in his hover chair staring out his window at the sea.

The Blondie turned as Riki stepped into the doorway.

"I'm back."

"So, I see."

Riki scowled. Really, that was all Iason had to say about it? He should have just stayed gone. "I almost didn't come back."

"That would have been your choice, Riki."

A spark of temper flared inside the Riki. Did Iason really not give a shit about him anymore? Was he finally tired of having a mongrel for a pet? Had their near death experience made him realize that there was an easier way to live, that he could have a less troublesome pet?

"Yeah, well, good night."

"Riki."

Riki reluctantly turned back to the doorway. "What?"

"Would you help me to the bed?"

Riki nodded as Iason guided the chair closer to the massive bed. He moved onto the bed to pull Iason from behind, as Iason used his upper body strength to lever himself onto the mattress. Together they got him properly situated.

"Do you want your clothes off?"

"Yes." Iason started to unbutton his tunic as Riki removed his boots, and then unsnapped his trousers.

Iason did not wear undergarments, most androids didn't, and even as Riki helped adjust Iason's form on the bed, so he was lying flat, and pulled the covers over him, his own body could not help but react to the sight of Iason's nakedness.

"What have you done to your hands?"

"Nothing. They're fine."

"Riki." Iason's hand sneaked up and curved around Riki's neck to bring the mongrel down for a kiss, even as his other hand slid inside the opening of Riki's robe to caress his nipples. "Stay."

Riki's response was automatic and immediate, and before he realized it he was straddling Iason as his master's tongue plundered his mouth. "Nnnn...no...wait..."

What was he doing? He had to stop, but he couldn't because he was conditioned to respond. His body arched as Iason's sucked a nipple into his mouth, felt the weight of his arousal between his legs and gasped. So good, it was so good....

No. He was free now and he couldn't go back to that. He was still trying to come to terms with his freedom, still testing the waters to see how far he could go before he would be reprimanded and brought back. Damn it! He felt like an adolescent again and struggled with himself against obeying Iason every time the Blondie spoke.

"Let me...go."

"No."

"You set....ahhh... me f...free, remember?"

"You are *mine*," Iason growled as he slid his hand down between them and stroked Riki. "You want me to touch you. Why do you deny it?"

"My b...body wants it because...nnngg... you t...trained it that way," Riki growled, frustrated. "I've never had a...ahhh..." Dear God! Obviously his new equipment was working as well as the old and seemed twice as sensitive, he was only seconds away from begging Iason for release. "....a r...real choice in the matter."

"Are you saying you would let me touch you only if you choose it?"

Riki didn't know what he was saying, he only knew that he had to get away from Iason before he gave into the cravings, before he became a pet again, yet he could not make his body pull away; his conditioning was too deep.

"You set me free," he whimpered even as his body continued to thrust into Iason's hand.

"Is that to be your mantra now?" Iason smirked. "Your defense against me, every time I touch you?"

"I..." Riki's hands gripped Iason's shoulders as the Blondie continued to fondle him. "Let me go."

Iason pulled Riki closer so that his lips were against the mongrel's ear. "Never. I will never let you go. You had your chance, pet, and you chose to stay. Now you are mine..."

At the word *pet*, Riki wrenched himself away so hard that he toppled backwards and landed on his ass beside the bed. "Fuck you!" he snarled and scrambled to his feet. "I said I would stay to help, but not as your pet! You set me free. I am *not* your pet, Iason, and I never will be again!"

Katze appeared in the doorway, just as Riki shoved past him and ran down the stairs. He looked at Iason who had, on instinct, tossed back his covers and tried to rise, then suddenly remembered he could no longer chase after Riki.

The former furniture rushed forward to prevent Iason from falling. "Careful, Master."

He got Iason settled back on the bed but could tell the Blondie was in turmoil, something that he had never witnessed before.

When Cal had advised that morning that Riki was gone, Iason had simply nodded. He'd allowed them to assist him in dressing and getting him his hover chair, and then he ordered them both away. The rest of the day had been spent staring out his window, refusing to eat or sleep. Iason kept his vigil, as if willing Riki to reappear at any moment.

Katze had waited nearby and watched his master, leaving only to check on the necessary things that required his attention. It frightened him to see Iason so still, so expressionless, reacting to nothing and no one, just staring out that damn window.

Riki had been given his freedom, and apparently the mongrel had decided to take it and run, but what else had Iason expected? He had expected Iason to be angry, perhaps even annoyed, but he hadn't expected such a...tragically human reaction. It was as if Iason had fallen into a hopeless depression, yet he knew that the children of Jupiter were incapable of such emotions.

He hadn't expected Riki to return, and so, just as he had been bidding Iason good night, he saw his master sit up and focus on something outside the window. When he walked over to investigate, he watched Riki walk inside the villa. He had managed a discrete glance at Iason, saw the relief on the Blondie's face, before it was masked, and then Iason had quietly asked for a glass of wine.

Katze had fetched the wine, noticed that Iason's hand was not at all steady as he accepted it, then left to attend Riki at his master's order. It wasn't until after Katze left the room that he had realized Iason had been scared, well and truly scared that Riki would not return.

The idea that anyone, even someone he considered a friend, had the power to actually devastate someone like Iason Mink angered Katze like nothing ever had before. He began to doubt Jupiter's choice to revive them both, sensing there would be far more pain for both of them before this was resolved.

"Bring Cal." Iason ordered quietly.

Katze nodded called Cal to their master

Cal did not ask what Iason wanted. The Blondie was different than before, not nearly as hard or unfeeling as he used to be, and it was discovered that

he was unable to sleep alone since waking up from the rejuvenation process and learning about Riki, who had still been undergoing treatment.

The young boy slid in between the sheets and curled up against his master. "Sleep now, Master," he whispered gently as Iason's arm curled around him. "Your Riki is home safe again and we're all here with you."

"Thank you, Cal." Iason sighed, closed his eyes and drifted off.

Iason hated this, he hated not having proper use of his legs, hated not being in control and having to depend on someone else, but he loved having Riki near him, encouraging him. Even now, as he held onto the cursed rails on either side of him he tried to will his legs to move faster, but they wouldn't listen and each small step was excruciating. Having never really felt pain before, at least not at a level that it affected him, the experience, while intriguing, was not one he was enjoying.

At the end of the path was Riki, beautiful courageous Riki, encouraging him, goading him to take another step, and then another.

"Keep going, you can do it. Come on, are you a Blondie or a mindless-sex doll?" Riki demanded when Iason's face clouded in fury, or he stopped moving, Riki goaded him further. "Move your ass, Iason!"

"You....have no r...right to...speak to me that way...Riki!" Iason ground out, but moved his left foot forward.

"So get over here and punish me. Come on!"

Iason took enough step, and another, and when he felt he could do no more, he took one more, and then his legs simply collapsed and he cursed as he started to fall.

As always Riki was there to catch him and Iason was grateful.

"Fuck, you're heavy," Riki said as he worked to support Iason's weight while Cal quickly brought Iason's hover chair closer.

They got Iason settled in the chair and Riki started to straighten and pull back, but Iason's arm around his neck tightened as his hand went for the mongrel's groin.

"Riki."

Riki looked into Iason's eyes, saw the longing and the need to respond to his master was strong, almost overwhelming. Iason had behaved himself for a little over a week, but now he was back to this again and Riki hated the fact that he immediately considered obeying and letting Iason take him; knowing the Blondie could still pleasure him with just with his hands.

Knowing his own self control was weak, and realizing he would have to depend on Iason's instead because of his deep rooted conditioning, caused him to be harsher than he had intended to be.

"Do it again," Riki growled quietly in his ear. "Fucking put your hands on me like this again and I'm gone, do you understand? You can take your defective legs and shove them up you fucking ass! I'm not doing this for you, Iason. I don't give a shit about you. I'm doing this because it is right and because when I am done, when you're back on your feet, I get to walk away from you free and clear and you..." He grabbed Iason's chin, roughly. "You do not get to come after me. You *do not* get to own me again, or touch me or give me fucking orders. Are we clear?"

So that was it, Iason sighed. Riki's pride was again in the way. Riki's pride had him staying so that the mongrel could leave only when they were both on equal footing, so he could say that he walked away from his master without sin, or sympathy or prejudicial circumstances. He supposed it made sense, to Riki anyway.

"You're a heartless bastard sometimes, Riki."

“Wonder where I learned that from?”

They glared at each other for a long, hard moment, until finally Iason loosened his hold and allowed Riki to straighten up.

Riki ran a hand through his hair and took several deep breaths.

“Do you want to eat or take a bath?”

Knowing that if he chose either it would be Cal that attended him, Iason chose another option. “Air,” he said. “I’d like you to take me for some fresh air.”

Riki hesitated for only a moment, and then stepped behind Iason’s chair, flipped the switch to manual and guided the chair through the doors into the bright, afternoon and onto the path that led to the beach. Stopping well away from the encroaching tide, Riki dropped down on the sand by Iason’s chair and pulled out a cigarette.

“Why don’t you give those up?”

“Why don’t you kiss my ass?”

Iason smirked and drank in the sight of his pet. No, Riki was no longer his pet. He knew that the mongrel was only staying to help him recover, and that he had pushed too hard, again, but old habits died hard, he supposed. He was so used to having Riki obey him, had worked so diligently for that reward of being able to touch him. It was very difficult being told that he couldn’t; harder still to be treated as if his wants and desires were unimportant.

He had no doubt that Riki would walk away and leave him if he persisted in his attempts to touch and bed the mongrel, however he couldn’t simply give up on who he was. He was accustomed to having his demands met, to people doing what he told them to. This...this was an uncomfortable feeling, this loss of control over those around him.

Katze and Cal still obeyed him, still treated him properly, but Riki; well Riki had never really given him the proper respect he deserved, and perhaps that was one of the things that had attracted Iason to the mongrel in the first place. Wanting to break that pride, that arrogance.

Still, he wanted to have Riki near him for as long as he could, even if it was just to see him and hear his voice, so he would simply have to curb his desires for awhile longer, a difficult task as all he wanted was for Riki to kiss him, hold him and take him to bed. He hoped that if he was patient, perhaps they could reach a compromise and Riki would stay with him.

“You will never let me hold you again, will you, Riki?”

Riki tensed again and looked out over the water. “I’m here for your recovery, Iason. You freed me remember? I’m not your pet anymore.”

Iason nodded. Yes, he had given Riki his freedom and he was regretting it now. At least part of him was. He had seen a different side of Riki these last few days, a side that his pet had never shown him before, perhaps had been too afraid or too proud to show him. It only made Iason want him more, and more than once he had considered asking Katze to find him another D-class pet ring, so he could make Riki his once more.

If there was any hope for them, Riki had to choose to stay with him, had to choose to be with him. He couldn’t force it, not again, not after what had happened. Seeing Riki coming back to him as the flames grew up around them had been the highest reward for all they had gone through. It was in that moment that he knew Riki was truly his and he'd been content to die, knowing that Riki was by his side.

However, as Riki drifted off beside him and no longer responded to Iason's words, the Blondie was flooded with such....well, it was hard to say exactly what the feeling was, having never experienced it before. Anger? Madness? Grief? Pain? He could only say that he didn't want Riki to die.

Even if it was with him, even if Riki came back for him, he hadn't wanted Riki to die and had tried to shield his beloved. In that one, desperate moment he would have preferred to have left Riki to Guy, or his gang or

anyone else as long as his darling boy could live. It wasn't right, it wasn't fair and his cry of sorrow had echoed around them and the still form he cradled.

Was that what Jupiter had sensed? Had she felt his pain and decided to intervene? Perhaps she was curious as to how he could have experienced such a thing, he was curious himself, but as yet Jupiter had not conveyed her thoughts to him. She had been communicating through Katze, as if punishing Iason by shutting him out even further from her embrace.

When he had awakened and been told that Riki was alive he had promised to behave better towards his pet, had promised to make Riki's life better, but seeing him again reawakened all his old desires and fears and he constantly seemed to be falling back into that controlling side of himself. There was, of course, the frustration of being bound to a chair and feeling tired and sore, something that he had never really felt before as a Blondie, which could also be causing him to act out.

Having never felt real pain before, it was an eye-opener for Iason, who was reasonably sure that Jupiter had done this to him on purpose. It wasn't logical, but for some reason Iason believed Jupiter was having a temper tantrum and he was her outlet. Still, he was confident that his creator had not foreseen Riki staying and helping him; even he had not considered that.

"I miss you," Iason said before he had fully formed the thought in his head and he heard Riki's startled gasp. "I...apologize for earlier, but I really miss you, Riki."

Riki inhaled deeply on his cigarette and regarded Iason quietly. He knew the Blondie was fighting a constant struggle not to revert to his controlling ways, and he did understand how hard that was for him. Iason was willing to just let him walk away, be free, and never set eyes on him again. But he was also, according to Katze, willing to stay a cripple as well and that was something that Riki couldn't accept.

No matter what else happened between them, Iason Mink was no coward. He was *The* Blondie, favoured son of Jupiter, leader of the syndicate, or at least he had been. Riki had never met anyone as powerful and confident as

Iason, or as brutal and terrifying. Seeing him so...meek was a hard pill to swallow, and he couldn't walk away while Iason was weak. It would hold no meaning to be free and to leave the Blondie unless Iason was at full strength, thus giving Riki the power to choose.

Iason was a champion manipulator and he couldn't help but think this was just another of Iason's ploys; but regardless, he couldn't leave the man helpless; just as he couldn't allow Guy to die. He didn't know if that made him a good person, or just really stupid.

"I know you do."

Iason lifted startled blue eyes to Riki again.

"But I can't...Iason. You have to know that. You have to understand what you did to me was..." Riki shook his head and sucked again on his cigarette. "I can't."

"So, you really will leave then, when I am recovered?"

"I think so, yeah."

They sat silently for a long moment, and then Iason asked. "Where will you go?"

"I don't know." He had considered staying and working with Katze, but now he wondered if it would just be better to book passage on a ship and get the hell off this fucking planet. He knew he would probably have to depend on Iason for the money for that too. "Away, maybe. I hear Freya is nice."

"You...would go off planet?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

Iason grew silent again and tried to suppress his grief. He had never considered that option. If Riki left Amoï he would not even be able to keep track of Riki, or make sure that he was safe and secure.

"Riki?" He waited until Riki met his gaze. "What do you remember of Dana Burn?"

"Just bits and pieces," Riki admitted.

He remembered that Guy had cut him, but thankfully he did not recall the actual act or the unimaginable pain he must have been in. He remembered Katze, again just bits and pieces, when they were in a room, and then outside after he had given the black market dealer Guy and asked him to take care of him. He remembered the sight of Iason's severed legs, and a black moon cigarette, but that was all. He knew he had gone back to be with Iason, but he couldn't remember anything he said or did at that time.

"I recall every detail. Every action, every word, the heat of the fire and..." Iason suddenly gripped the sides of the chair and tried to hoist himself up.

"What are you doing?" Riki had tossed his cigarette and was moving to catch the Blondie even as Iason started to slide. Riki's arms clamped around Iason as they fell back on the sand together.

"I...I just wished to sit beside you," Iason muttered as he rolled himself off of Riki and sat up, glaring at his the way his useless legs were twisted.

"You should have just said." Riki knelt to straighten Iason's legs in the sand and make the man more comfortable. "There, is that okay?"

"It's fine, I can barely feel them except when I am trying to walk."

"Yeah." Riki's hands unconsciously squeezed one of Iason's legs. "It's weird that you do, really. I mean, I don't know much about how you're built, but you've never showed pain before, so I assumed you didn't feel it.

"We feel pain, however we simply do not have the same reactions as humans do to it. It is less a feeling and more sensory perception for us. It is the same for pleasure, we can feel pleasure, enjoy the stimulations, yet it is different than how you would feel, Riki."

"Yeah, I figured that." Riki started to massage Iason's calf. "You never make any sounds during...well...I mean..." He needed to change the topic, fast. "But it does seem to hurt you when you're trying to walk, that's more than just sensory."

"It is yes, I am not sure what is causing it, perhaps the defect that has affected my legs is also causing me to experience a more realistic condition." Iason reached for Riki's hair, brushed his hand through it. "And just because I do not make any sound when we are mating, does not mean I do not fully enjoy it, Riki. Only with you can I feel that level of pleasure as intensely as I do."

Riki flushed, lowered his head and moved his hands to Iason's other calf, but did not slap the Blondie's hand away from his hair. It was okay, he told himself, to allow this little bit. It comforted Iason and besides, this was really the first time they had actually talked about anything significant.

"Will you go back to Tanagura?"

"As I am I cannot go back."

"But, when you're walking again and back to normal you will?"

Iason watched Riki lower his head again, his dark hair that had grown to shoulder length neatly hiding his face from view. So beautiful, his Riki was, so dark, and rich, and his hands were strong, firm and delightfully relaxing as they massaged the aching muscles in Iason's legs. Iason felt himself grow aroused.

"Stop it." Riki, noticing Iason's predicament even in the moonlight, pulled his hands away and sat down again, to light another cigarette.

"It is an automatic response, Riki. I cannot stop it." When Riki chose to remain silent, Iason continued. "I will return to Tanagura once I am healed, if that is what Jupiter wishes of me."

"Why..." Riki began and then fell silent again.

"Why?" Iason prompted.

"Why do you think Jupiter saved me?"

"I do not know. I can only be grateful that she did."

"So you wouldn't have to train a new pet?"

Iason sighed. "That would be troublesome," he agreed. "However, as you continue to remind me you are no longer my pet, so it hardly seems a valid reason, does it?"

"Then why..." No. Riki had already asked Iason why he had been set free and the Blondie refused to give him a valid reason. Besides, he told himself it no longer mattered. All that mattered was that he was free.

"This is nice."

"What is?"

"Talking to you like this. You would never talk to me before, Riki."

"Because you were always too busy fucking me, Iason."

Iason scowled. Was that true? Yes, he supposed it was. He did keep Riki naked most of the time, but he couldn't help that. Riki brought out the beast in him, and even when he tried to talk to Riki about other things, the mongrel was so abrupt and defensive it was wasted energy.

"You never asked anything of me either," Iason countered. "No matter what I tried, you always threw my offers back at me."

"Because I didn't need you to fucking buy me things, just to alleviate your conscience."

"I'm not sure what you mean."

Riki shook his head. "It doesn't matter." He rose suddenly tossed his cigarette. "Time to go in." He slid his hands under Iason's arms, and

together with the Blondie's upper body strength they got him back in the chair. "I'll have Cal run a bath for you."

"Riki..." Iason didn't want to stop talking, he wanted to know more about Riki, get inside his pet's mind and heart. Why was Riki being so difficult?

Riki remained silent and started to direct Iason back to the house.

"I will not apologize for making you my pet," Iason stated, angry that he no longer had control over what Riki did.

If they were back in Eos, Riki would have had to listen to him, would have had to accept his demands. But then, perhaps that was part of the problem. Riki had been forced; was that what Riki had meant by having the right to choose? But if Riki was given that right he wouldn't chose to stay, would he? All he had ever wished for was to be away from the life of a pet.

"I will not apologize," Iason continued as they entered the house. "It is how things are in Tanagura, it is what I know and who I am." He paused as they entered the lift that would bring them to the second floor. "I will say that I....I regret hurting you and...removing your...choice."

Riki had never expected such a concession from Iason and tried to decide how he felt about it. He had forgiven Guy for cutting him, well enough that he didn't want revenge anyway, and he had forgiven Iason for hurting Guy in the first place, understanding how upset the Blondie had been. But he didn't know if he could ever forgive Iason for the captivity, torture and submission that had been forced on him. Still, regret was something, wasn't it? Especially to a man like Iason Mink?

He nodded in acceptance as Cal stepped out of Iason's room, then turned away again and left his master in the capable hands of the furniture.

Chapter 16

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki and Iason are both frustrated and they both say more than they intend to.

Notes for the Chapter:

I want to thank everyone so very, very much for taking the time to comment or leave kudos. As an reward for all your great support and of course extra incentive for even more comments (because I am really quite shameless, which is fine as Iason insists pets need not feel shame) Anyone who reviews this chapter, are also welcome email me (animefaemoon@gmail.com) with any scenes they would like to see happen in the future telling of this story and I will see what I can work it and give any that are chosen credit for the idea. :-)

"Must we do this?" Iason demanded sourly as Cal worked and stretched his right leg the way the doctor had shown them. It felt rather demeaning to have the furniture bend and stretch, pull and press his leg as he lay there like a slab of meat. "Are there not machines for this sort of thing?"

"Probably, but this way is better," Riki advised as he leaned against the wall and observed the process. "The machines won't properly negotiate your resistance ratio or the weariness of your body."

"Well then why can't you be doing this instead of the furniture?"

Cal paused with Iason's leg pressed into the android's chest. "Am I hurting you, Master?"

"Yes!"

"He's a big boy," Riki assured. "Keep going, Cal,"

"I don't want *him* to do it!"

Cal stopped and stepped back in obedience. "I am sorry, Master."

Riki glared at Iason. "What is your problem?"

"If I must be subjected to this...this invasive procedure, then I insist that you do it, Riki."

"Invasive?" Riki asked, raising his eyebrows and moving closer to lean on the table where Iason lay. "He's fucking bathed you, helped you dress and seen both of us naked hundreds of times, so *how* can this be invasive?"

"This is different! I did not request this, nor do I require it!"

"You do require it if you are going to get better!"

"I can get better without this!" It was indecent for furniture to be touching him so intimately, especially when it hurt so much!

Riki saw Iason's control slipping and spoke before he could help himself. "What's the matter, Iason? You can dish it out, but you can't take it?"

"M...master Riki..." Cal warned quietly, but Riki ignored him.

"Don't you enjoy being pinched and mauled and stretched to the point of pain? Isn't it so much fun to have people watching your discomfort, your humiliation?"

"How dare...." Iason began.

"But wait, you're not naked, or chained. It's only good if you can't fucking move, isn't that right?"

Iason forced himself to be calm, slowly levered himself into a sitting position before speaking again. "Are you seriously comparing my situation to the training of a *pet*? Is that why you are making Cal do this, because you enjoy seeing me at my worst? Is this some sort of twisted revenge on your part?"

"Hell yes!"

Riki wished it was the truth, but he actually didn't like seeing Iason in such a weakened and embarrassed state; in fact he hated it. There were times in the past, certainly, where he wished what was done to him could be done to the Blondie, but seeing even this mild degradation for Iason was difficult. It made his stomach cramp and his chest ache, and he didn't understand why.

"Bring me to my room." Iason started to pull one of his legs off the table. "This session is over."

"No!" Riki moved forward to stop him and was immediately caught in Iason's strong arms. Damn it! He should have seen that coming. "Iason, you have to do your therapy!"

"I have to do nothing more than what I desire," Iason growled and pressed his lips to Riki's throat. "And what I desire is you, Riki."

"Damn it!" Riki pushed against him, even as his head tilted to the side to allow Iason's touch. "This is why you, mother fucker! You get aroused whenever I come near you!" They both did actually, but he wasn't about to openly admit to that. "So that leaves Cal, since Katze had to run out and tend to...whatever the hell he's doing."

"It is not the place of furniture...."

"A furniture's goal is to serve his master in whatever manner is necessary, to promote his master's good health, happiness and well being."

Iason paused in the trail of kisses along Riki's neck to pull back enough and stare hard at Riki, surprised that the mongrel had recited the rule so perfectly then glanced at Cal. "Leave us."

"Yes, Master."

"Don't go far," Riki demanded through gritted teeth. "You'll be coming right back."

Cal looked from one to the other, then stepped out of the room and closed the door.

"Iason, let go."

"I do not wish it."

"I could give two rat shitting fucks what you wish, let me go!"

Riki struggled and pushed against Iason's chest until finally the Blondie released him. It pissed him off knowing that he was only free because Iason allowed it. The Blondie's strength was incomparable with his own.

He stumbled back, caught himself, and pulled a chair in front of him, as if he using it as a shield. "What could you possibly have to say that couldn't be said in front of Cal?" he demanded, still able to feel Iason's lips on him and hating that he had grown instantly aroused by it. "Considering he has patched me up multiple times, thanks to your tender loving care..."

Iason did not miss the scathing sarcasm in Riki's tone.

"Bathed me, fed me and sometimes helped me to piss?"

"I do not wish for Cal to do this."

"Why?"

"I don't care for....I simply do not wish it! That should be enough..."

"You sleep with him in your bed like he's a fucking stuffed doll, so you can damn well suffer through him doing your therapy." When Iason's icy gaze fizzled slightly in shock, Riki smirked. "Did you think I didn't know?"

"Are you jealous, Riki?"

"Don't be stupid!"

"It is only to sleep." Iason sighed, seeing through his pet's bravado. "I would never lay hands on furniture in a sexual way, and if you believe such

a thing could happen, then you truly do not understand their purpose..."

"If I thought for one minute you touched him like that I would fucking kill you."

"Riki!"

"I mean it, Iason. What you did to me is one thing, but if you ever, ever do anything to hurt that kid, I will make you regret it and I don't give one sweet fuck that you think of him as your property."

"Riki," Iason's eyes narrowed, curious. "Are you still disturbed about Daryl?"

"Don't you fucking mention his name!"

Iason blinked slowly, considered. "What happened to Daryl was out of my hands..."

Riki lowered his head. "I don't want to talk about him!"

"I would never hurt Cal, Riki. Truly. I have come to care for him, just as you do."

"Bullshit. All he is to you is a possession."

"That may have been accurate at one time, but it is no longer the case. I would not wish any harm on him. I have not punished him for any of the times he has disappointed me." Well, not once Riki had returned to Eos anyway, but that was because Iason understood that it was not due to Cal's inability to do as requested, but more his own pet's rebellious nature that caused the furniture to be unable to perform his tasks. "Does that not count for anything?"

"Would you free him?" Riki asked suddenly. "If it got you something else that you wanted, would you?"

Iason's mouth opened, then closed again, recalculated. "Are you...offering your freedom for his?"

"If I said yes, would you do it?"

"No."

"What?" Riki's eyes widened, he was sure that Iason would jump at the chance. "Why?"

"Riki, Cal is furniture, he has been conditioned to serve a master, and furniture that is no longer required by its master is either sold to another master or terminated. As terminating him would upset you more, my only choice would be to sell him, and I cannot promise that his life would improve with another."

"But if you free him he can go and be whatever he wants to be. You did it for Katze, why can't you do it for Cal?"

"Katze had a unique quality skill that I could utilize, but he is not free, he still belongs to me. Cal is good furniture, but he does not possess any superior skills that would give him an advantage, such as what Katze had."

"Then give him some money and send him on a transport off world, or get that casino owner friend of yours to hire him or..."

"It is impossible, Riki. There is simply no where else I could send him, no way that I could apply him...."

"And that's all that matters to you, isn't it, how others are of use to you? You don't give a shit about anyone but yourself. All you ever do is use others for your benefit to get what you want."

"*Do not* lecture me on such matters, Riki. Was it not you, a mere street mongrel, selling yourself on the street to gain whatever you desired? You, who approached a Blondie and offered your body as hush money, just to serve your own pride?"

"That was different! I never..." Riki began, then flushed because it was closer to the truth than he wanted to admit.

He had never used his body just for money or status, only to get food or shelter; and only in the beginning or to pay back a debt. It was what everyone did in Ceres. It didn't make him a whore.

"Was it not you who was so desperate to get out of the slums that you went to work for a black market dealer without knowing or caring of the consequences, and then foolishly following me in Tanagura, creating a situation that you insist you despise, a situation you returned to of your own free will, all for your own selfish needs?"

"I had no fucking idea you were going to kidnap me, hold me captive! And you threatened to make Guy a mindless sex doll! You threatened to destroy my gang! How the hell is accepting an offer I couldn't fucking refuse selfish?"

"You could have refused it, you chose not to because you did not want to live with the guilt of what would happen to them because of you, Riki. You returned to me so you would not have to feel sorrow over them; that was your true motivation; that is always your motivation. You dislike feeling remorse or guilt over others, so you make choices that keep you from doing so."

Riki gaped at him. "That....that's bullshit! How...you don't understand humans at all you emotionless piece of synthetic trash!"

"You wanted to return to me, Riki," Iason growled, darkly, ignoring the insult. "I gave you your freedom for a year and what did you do with it? You went back to your old ways, barely existing, lazing around with your friends, too drunk to care about anyone or anything. Why did you not look for work again? Why did you not plot a way to get out of the slums you hate so much?"

"Fuck you!" It was true, all of it, and the fact that Iason knew it frightened and shamed him. Fucking Katze! Had he been spying on him that whole time, or no, was it Kirie? That motherfucker who had betrayed them all for money?

"You were back with your precious Guy," Iason continued, in that horrifically calm, controlled tone that Riki hated. "Yet he didn't move back in with you. You were always together outside, so why weren't you fucking him?"

There was no way Iason could know that! No fucking way! "Who said I wasn't?"

"I saw you in Midas, Riki; don't you remember? I could tell how desperate, how needy you were with one look. If you were getting what you needed from someone else you would never have looked at me that way."

"I was scared! I was scared you would try to take me back, and you did just that!"

"You were scare because you wanted to come back, Riki, and for no other reason. You belonged to me and you knew it then, just as you know it now."

"Fuck you!"

Iason sensed Riki's fragile emotional state and yet the Blondie in him refused to back down. "Did Guy fail to give you what you needed, what you longed for every time I held you? Did your mongrel touch you the way I touch you, make you breathless and pant like an animal? Did you scream his name when you came?"

"Shut up!" Riki snarled, because it hurt, it hurt so much that he hadn't been able to do just that. He'd turned away from Guy, refused to consider touching him; but that was out of shame. It wasn't because he preferred Iason's touch. It wasn't because he knew that Guy could not make him feel the same things Iason had. It wasn't!

"You were fading from existence, until I stepped in and gave you a reason to live again. I rescued you from your own self-annihilation, just as I rescued you the first time from a miserable, dead-end life in the slums. "

Riki's stepped forward and swung, but Iason caught his wrist in a vice grip, then did the same when he tried with the other hand. "Do you think being

chained up, drugged, humiliated and fucked until I passed out was a better life?" he hissed, furiously. "You think I wanted to be tormented and ridiculed and reduced to nothing, just so you could show me off at a fucking party filled with perverts? That's what you call a better life than what I had? That's how you justify your insipid need for control, your...your perversions?"

Iason realized that he had gone too far and considered making amends, but then realized that it was time they got to the core of the matter, time for Riki to face the truth. "You were undernourished, barely clothed and probably suffering minor injuries daily. I took you off the streets, tended you and gave you pleasure..."

"And kept me naked and fed *on* me, and used me as entertainment for your sick Elitest friends, and beat me, and tortured me and fucking *broke me*!" He screamed the last two words and felt tears of pain and frustration well up in his throat. "Why! Why me? Why did you have to do that to me? I was nobody! Why did you fucking pick me?"

"You chose it!" Iason snapped, even as his heart broke at Riki's anguish.

He had been unable to stop thinking about the young, proud, beautiful mongrel that had responded so incredibly to him. He had never had a pet react the way Riki had, never had one that resisted such a natural way of feeling either. It had been intoxicating.

"You sought me out, Riki. You knew what I was, who I was, yet you couldn't stay away. Why? Why did you come after me if you knew that something like that could happen? There can be only one reason, that you wanted it, craved it, just as I did!"

"No!"

"Lie to yourself all you like, Riki, but we both know the truth. You came to me willingly, expecting me to do those same things to you."

"I didn't expect to become your fucking pet! I just wanted to...I just...."

Riki had been unable to stop thinking about what the Blondie had done to him in that small room in Midas. He'd dreamed about it, every night, so much that he felt like he was cheating on Guy. And when he tried to have sex with his partner, a man he cared so deeply for, there was no comparison. It was nice, normal, and not at all satisfying.

It was pride that had him following Iason, and yet he had never fully formed what he would do when he found the Elite. He had never considered anything beyond being angry that Iason had managed to make him feel so dirty and perverted. He'd wanted the Blondie to pay for that, for making him feel like nothing, for changing his relationship with Guy. He'd wanted revenge, but he had also wanted to feel that way again. He'd wanted to see if his body could feel that kind of rapture again.

"I...I would have stayed," Riki murmured and dropped his head as he felt all the anger leave him and his body sag from defeat, because Iason was right. They both knew the truth and the full horror of it slapped Riki hard in the face.

If Iason had showed him even a moment of tenderness, or kindness, he would have willingly stayed and been the Blondie's partner; but to make him a pet; to use such methods to condition him to respond and reply and heel like a dog...Riki could never forgive that.

"Riki?" Iason's eyes widened at the words and pulled Riki closer. "What do you mean you would have stayed? Tell me!"

Riki shook his head and refused to meet Iason's demanding gaze. No. He would never say why, not now. There was no point. The Blondie had not been kind, or could not be, and so that time was gone. Now...now he could only think about what to do from here; how to swim through the murky, churning depths that was their relationship. He needed to ignore his heart and use his head.

"Let me go," he whispered and flexed his wrists. "Please."

Iason released him and Riki stepped back. "Riki..."

Hearing the emotion in Iason's voice, Riki quickly changed the subject. "Will you really not even consider freeing Cal?"

"If I were to free Cal, what do you think would happen to him?" Iason sighed, allowing the change in venue.

While he wanted to press Riki for the meaning of his words, he could see his pet was emotionally exhausted after their explosive conversation.

"He only knows the life of a furniture, and the moment he interacted with anyone else they would know that about him as well. He is a eunuch, so he could never have a relationship with anyone and once they learned of his origin he would be subjected to far worse horrors. What you are suggesting is idealistic and reckless. Freeing him may make you feel better, Riki, but in the end it could get Cal mutilated or killed."

Riki sighed, rubbed his hands over his face and dropped down in a chair by the therapy table. God, he was tired. He was only managing a couple of hours of sleep a night because his mind was so full with choices and decisions and everything that was going on that it took him forever to fall asleep and when he did finally doze off, he was plagued by nightmares that had him bolting up and drenched in sweat less than an hour or so later.

It was after one particularly harsh nightmare where Iason had again been burned alive that he had awoken and needed to find Iason, check that he was okay. He had seen Cal sleeping with the Blondie and had not known what to make of it, until he asked Katze about it who simply said that the furniture helped Iason sleep.

"Why do you need him to sleep with you?"

"I am plagued by recollections of Dana Burn."

Riki lifted his gaze, startled. "Nightmares?" He didn't think androids could dream.

"I would not say that exactly, however every time I attempt to shut down for the night, it seems that instance filters into my memory banks and replays

itself, over and over in vivid detail. I cannot say what causes it and I cannot find a way to shut it out." Iason rubbed his thumb across Riki's knuckles. "Cal talks to me, gives me a...I suppose an anchor to hold on to, until I can get past the memory and can finally rest."

Riki's regarded him quietly. "Me too," he admitted. "I...I've been having dreams too and I...not always about Dana Burn, but about burning, or being in pain or just being locked in the cold and the darkness." And watching Iason die, or being unable to find him, or hearing Iason scream and not being able to reach him, but Riki would not say that to the man before him; he couldn't.

"It seems we are both experiencing some residual trauma. Is this why you've looked so exhausted lately?"

"Have I?"

"Yes. You always look as if you are about to fall over."

"Maybe." Riki shrugged. "Some of it, I guess."

"Riki, why don't you take Cal's place and come and sleep with me? Perhaps we can help each other through this..."

Riki shook his head and rose. "We would end up not sleeping at all, Iason, and you know it."

"What does any of that matter, if it can help you sleep...."

"No."

Iason sighed. "Very well, if you change your mind you know where I am."

"Can I bring Cal back in, now?"

"If you must, however, I must insist on one thing, at least?"

"Like what?" Riki asked warily.

"If you are going to persist that Cal do this...therapy for me, I want you to spend some time with me in the whirlpool after. It would probably do us both some good." Riki stared at him and Iason lifted his hands, peaceably. "I will stay on my side."

"Fine, whatever." Riki moved to the door to call for Cal.

Cal readily returned and continued the therapy, and about thirty minutes later, he and Riki managed to get Iason situated in the whirlpool tub that had been installed a week before. Riki changed into swimming trunks; he miraculously had just as much an assortment of clothes here as he had in Eos, and climbed in opposite Iason.

Seemingly pleased his two masters were no longer at odds, Cal brought wine for Iason and a bottle of Sake for Riki, then advised he would return with their lunch shortly.

Iason sighed, sipped his wine, then set it on the holder over the tub and leaned his head back. "I do not care for this pain business much."

"Yeah, sucks balls, doesn't it?"

"Indeed."

Riki smirked and rolled his head around on his shoulders. The hot, bubbling water felt good on his tired body, but must be a joy to Iason after his session. He still couldn't quite fathom the reason for what Jupiter had forced on her favorite son.

"Do you really think Jupiter is punishing you? I mean, that's why she didn't fix you properly, right?" he asked, before he could help himself.

Iason lifted his head and ocean blue met dark obsidian. "A test, perhaps." Jupiter was all about gaining new insights and information, even at the discomfort of her children. "I will learn more once I return to Eos and speak with her."

Riki stared at the bottle in his hand. "Why bother, if she is going to do something like this to you? Why not stay away from her?"

"Because I can't. She is my creator, I am her son and must obey her wishes."

"That's a fucked up relationship, Iason."

"Indeed." Iason nodded. "Perhaps even more fucked than my relationship with you, Riki."

"Nothing's that fucked up."

Iason smiled as Cal returned with a trolley of finger sandwiches, meats and fruits. "That looks lovely, Cal. Thank you."

Cal beamed at him. "Certainly, Master. Would you like me to stay and serve?"

"No, just set them on the floor, that's fine."

Cal nodded, set the trays close to the rim of the tub on both sides, so that either man could simply reach for what he wanted and rose again. "Shall I refill your glasses?"

"Yes." Iason held up his glass and Cal topped up his wine, but Riki still had nearly a full bottle and shook his head.

"Shall I massage your neck, Master? Are you stiff?"

"Why yes I am, Cal." Iason's eyes held Riki's, so the mongrel understood he was not talking about his neck muscles. "Very stiff."

Riki rolled his eyes, and chose to take a drink to hide the smile that was starting to form. "I could go put on a shirt," he muttered.

"Don't you dare." Iason glanced up at the boy whose slim fingers were already doing wonderful things to his neck. "Cal, would you like me to free you?"

The boy paled so badly that even his lips turned white, and his fingers stopped moving. "I...have I displeased you, Master?"

"No, you have served me quite well."

"Iason," Riki warned, surprised by the affect the question had on Cal. Did the furniture truly not wish to have his freedom?

"Riki believes you would be happier if you were free, Cal. Is that the case?"

Ca's gaze flew to Riki's and for an instant there was a note of betrayal in them, before he quickly lowered his head again. "I...I live to serve you, Master Iason."

"Yes, but if you could be free, would you choose to be?"

"What....would I do?" Cal asked, obviously trying to maintain the proper decorum, as his training demanded, but he was physically shaking. "Where...would I...I go? Who...who would have a...a discarded f...furniture? I...I would be....I would be...nothing. I...If I cannot serve a...a master I would rather...be dead."

Riki was shocked by how frightened Cal seemed at the prospect. "That's enough, Iason," he growled; seeing the truth of the Blondie's earlier words, and saddened by it.

Iason lifted his hand and touched Cal's cheek, forcing the young boy to meet his gaze. "I apologize for frightening you." he offered gently. "I was simply trying to make a point and Riki did not mean to hurt you by suggesting such a thing, he simply does not understand you."

Cal's gaze flickered to Riki, then returned to Iason again. "So... I....may stay?"

"Of course! We could not do without you." Iason smiled at him then glanced at the fine lunch the furniture had prepared for them. "However, I now also see why Riki suggested such a thing. You do a great deal for me, Cal."

"It is my purpose, Master."

"It is yes, and it is good to have a purpose, is it not?"

"Yes, Master."

"I think you do such a good job, that you have earned a reprieve from your duties for a time. What do you think of that?"

Cal's eyes widened. "A...reprieve, Master?"

"Yes. While we laze here in our tub, enjoying our lovely lunch, why don't you take an hour to yourself and do whatever you like."

"Like...what, Master?"

Riki couldn't believe what he was hearing, Iason was actually showing appreciation for Cal, was willing to give a furniture time to himself. When Iason met Riki's startled gaze, the blue eyes seemed to say 'see, I can be nice.'

"Uh...why not look up different swimming techniques?" Riki suggested suddenly. "Find the one you like best or think might be good for you and I'll take you out later to try it?"

Cal looked from Iason to Riki, to Iason again. "Would that be acceptable, Master?"

"It is your time, do as you like. You can have another hour to go swimming, won't that be fine?"

Cal flushed and rose. "I...thank you...both. I...I shall go and research those things now." He left the room and Riki watched until the doors closed, then turned back to Iason.

"Why did you do that to him?"

"I needed you to understand that while you think freedom is the only way, for someone like Cal it is a death sentence, and he is well aware of it."

"Then why did you do the rest of it?"

"I'm not sure," Iason said easily. "Perhaps, to show us both that I can change my ways? Did it please you, what I did for Cal?"

"It seemed to please him, doesn't that matter more?"

"No," Iason replied. "I did that for you, not for him, to show you that I can be thoughtful and appreciative when it is called for."

"So that was just another one of your games, another way of manipulate me into staying?"

Iason shrugged and reached for a sandwich. "Manipulation is in my nature, just as quarrelling is in yours. I am not attempting to change your mind, Riki, merely your heart."

Riki sank down up to his neck in the water and brooded.

Iason allowed the silence for a few moments more, then said. "Now that we have chased Cal off, I have no one to relieve my stiffness." He smiled slowly at Riki. "Will you not assist me?"

"Your hands still work," Riki tossed back, having no intention of assisting Iason, but he couldn't help wonder what it would be like to watch the Blondie pleasure himself. He felt his temperature skyrocket at the thought.

"Why don't you come here and test that theory?"

"You don't need me, just grab it and pull."

"You are so vulgar, p...Riki."

Riki caught the amended word, but chose not to comment on it. Iason really *was* trying not to use it and he found that...endearing. "I thought you were going to behave?"

"I said I would stay on my side. There is no rule that says you cannot join me on my side."

Riki smirked. "Not happening."

"You're such a tease, Riki," Iason sighed as his hand slid beneath the water. "Oh, very well."

Riki's eyes widened. He wasn't really going to...was he? He'd never seen Iason masturbate, he didn't think Blondie's did that sort of thing. They always watched their pets fornicate or masturbate and derived their pleasure from that; well except for Iason who liked to fondle and fuck him personally.

"You're not seri..." He couldn't really see below the bubbling water, but based on Iason's arm movements he was really jerking himself off. It seemed...wrong and somehow indecent. "Stop!" Riki's swim trunks tightened and before he realized what he was doing he closed the space between them and caught Iason's hand below the water. "Stop that!"

"So you do want to assist me? How nice." Iason's hand, quick as a snake, turned in Riki's grip and pulled the boy's fingers against his throbbing member. "Touch me, Riki. We'll do it together."

Iason's free hand yanked Riki free from his shorts so their engorged penises rubbed together, then he anchored the mongrel's fingers around both and started to move their hands.

"This isn't..." Riki began, even as his breath hitched and his cock responded to the friction. "Wa...wait. I don't..." But he did. He did want this. God! He wanted this. "Iason," the last word was a whimper, because he was already lost and he didn't have the strength to pull away.

"Just this, Riki. Let us have this at least."

Iason's words were like silk against his skin, intense heat penetrating his pounding heart and sent shivers of drowning ecstasy to his body.

"Not...fair. You...can't..." Riki felt his climax building; so fast! God, he got there so fast already; a sign of his desperation, and for a very brief moment

suddenly wished for the pet ring to keep him in check. "I can't hold...Iason...."

"Now, Riki! Now, let it go!" Iason was also on the cusp, surprising for him as it usually took him much longer; but having Riki so close and finally touching him had been his undoing.

They both came in mixture of need, joy and heat. Riki slid to his knees in the tub, between Iason's legs, because he couldn't hold himself up any longer. He leaned his head against the Blondie's chest, tried to steady his breathing, his heart rate.

"Why...why did you do that?"

Iason smiled and ran his fingers through Riki's hair. "What a foolish question."

"I'm...not your ...pet."

Iason caught his chin, lifted it so that Riki would meet his gaze. "Whatever label we chose, you are *mine*, Riki." He leaned down, captured Riki's mouth in a sensuous kiss. "And I am yours. We belong to each other."

Riki didn't have an answer, because he wanted Iason to kiss him again and hated himself for it. He didn't know what feelings were real and what had been programmed anymore. What part was his heart and what was his conditioning?

He pulled away, unsteadily and made it to the other side of the pool so he could step out, both grateful and disappointed that Iason allowed it. He grabbed a towel. "You're a fucking bastard," he muttered, angry at Iason, at himself for letting that happen. He stalked to the door and swung it open, just as Katze had been about to enter. "You help him out. I'm done."

Katze glanced after Riki, then turned to Iason who was brooding in the whirlpool. "Do you need help?"

Iason leaned his head back, stared up at the ceiling and swore softly. "Yes, apparently so."

Chapter 17

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki can't sleep, so he heads to Iason's room

Notes for the Chapter:

Please, please comment/review if you love me! :) or at least love the story.

Riki bolted awake from another nightmare of being burned alive with Iason. He let out a shuddering breath and lay back down, but almost immediately was sitting up again with the urge to vomit.

The dreams were getting worse and his sleep time was getting less and less. He woke up scared and afraid every single damn night and he didn't know what he should do about it. Was Iason also experiencing such problems? The Blondie was apparently sleeping with Cal to settle himself, although he couldn't imagine Iason being unsettled by anything.

He rose, pulled on a robe and, before he realized where he was going or why, found himself outside of Iason's room. Opening the door slowly, he peered inside. The moonlight filtered in through the windows and highlighted the large bed, which showed two forms, one large one small.

Cal's eyes opened as if on instinct that there was someone in the room he could be serving.

"Riki?" he whispered, surprised. "Did you need something?"

"Go on to your own bed, Cal."

"But, Master Iason..."

"I'll stay in here, you go on."

Cal still hesitated, Master Iason had said that he should listen to Riki as well as him, but still... to leave without permission...

"It's fine," Iason whispered to the boy, so quietly that Riki could not have heard him. "You may go."

Cal reluctantly slipped from Iason's warm embrace; it had been rather nice to have someone hold him as he slept, but he knew that his Master would much prefer Riki in his bed. He had to crawl across the wide mattress to get to Riki. His feet swung out and touched the floor.

"Do you need anything before I go?" he asked quietly.

"No." Riki ruffled Cal's hair, making the boy grin. "Go on to bed, sorry for waking you."

"Not at all, Riki. Good night."

Riki watched as Cal stepped out and closed the bedroom door, then stared down at the apparently sleeping man before him. Iason wasn't asleep, the android would have been aware the moment someone else had entered the room, but Iason's eyes remained closed.

Riki was already reconsidering his decision to come here, but if Iason couldn't sleep alone for the same reasons as he, what harm could there be? Besides, it got Cal off the hook right? Sure, it was better if he did it than leave it to the poor kid, at least that was how he convinced himself as he sat on the bed.

He started to pull off his robe, then pulled it tight around him again, as if using it as a shield. He crawled into the bed, turned away from Iason and closed his eyes. He was aware of Iason's presence behind him, felt the weight of the other's body in the bed. Maybe that would be enough to stop the nightmares.

Fingers touched his bare arm. "Riki?"

"Just go back to sleep, Iason."

"Did you have a nightmare?"

"Yes."

"I did as well." Iason sighed into the darkness. "Will you...come closer, Riki?"

"We're not gonna fuck..."

"No...I know. Just...lay against me so I can hear your heart beat, feel your breath."

He had noticed that Cal had been curled tightly into Iason's chest. "Does that...help you?"

"It does, yes."

"Don't try anything."

"I am too tired for that."

Riki hesitated a few more minutes, then slid closer so his back was against Iason's smooth chest, but kept his hands and legs tightly against his own body.

"May I...put my arm around you?"

It was so weird to hear him ask, that at first Riki was too surprised to respond.

"Riki?"

"Yeah, go...ahead."

Iason's arm slid under Riki's neck, then around him, his hand resting on Riki's sternum so he could feel Riki's heart beat, which had picked up slightly at his touch.

"Thank you, Riki."

"Sure." He heard Iason sigh. "Is it...bad?"

"Is what bad?"

"Your dream...memory...whatever?"

"It is dreadfully accurate and I do not enjoy reliving it over and over every night."

"Yeah...I guess that would suck." Riki paused, tried not to think how comfortable he felt, how...safe it was in Iason's arms. "Mine too...suck."

"I am sorry to hear that, Riki."

"Do you think it's gonna be like this always?"

"I certainly hope not." Although, Iason considered, if it kept Riki sleeping in his bed he would put up with it.

"Does it...bother you?"

It felt weird, the two of them speaking so quietly in the darkness and surrounding quiet, just generally talking to Iason like this. He tried to remember if they had ever done this before, just lain together and talked; but he couldn't recall a single time. Usually if they were in bed they were having sex, and once the sex was over he was too exhausted to do anything but sleep.

"Bother me? I am not familiar with that term Riki. How do you mean?"

Riki wondered if his sudden need to chat was because he was so nervous about being there, and if talking was just a way to take his mind off the fact that he was once again sharing a bed with Iason Mink? Part of him wanted Iason to take him, another part feared it.

"I mean do they scare you? Wait, forget it. You don't get scared."

"Of course I get scared, Riki."

Riki turned slightly in Iason's arms so he could look up into that familiar face and judge if he was lying. "Really?"

"Yes."

"I've never seen you scared of anything."

"You did, that day at Dana Burn, when you opened that door looking for Guy. I was very scared, Riki. Scared I had lost you, scared he had critically injured you."

Riki felt a knot grow in his chest and wet his suddenly dry lips. He remembered stumbling through the corridors, calling Guy's name, and then opening that one door where Iason and Guy had been. Iason had embraced him, so hard, hard enough almost to crush ribs. The action had stunned him, he hadn't understood it then, but now...If that was because Iason was scared, well, he supposed it made sense.

"I'm sorry," he murmured as he stared into those intense blue eyes and silently cursed when he felt moisture creep into his own. "It was my fault. Everything Guy did was my fault. He killed...almost killed you and it was my fault."

"No." Iason soothed a hand through Riki's hair, gently pulled him closer. "None of that was your doing, Riki."

"I...we drove him to it, Iason. We..."

"Guy made his own choices and he alone is responsible for them. You cannot blame yourself for a deficiency in others..."

"He wasn't deficient! He's a good guy, the best! He never would have thought of something like this if I hadn't hurt him, and if you hadn't taken me away from him!"

Iason pressed his lips to Riki's in a soothing, gentle kiss, immediately felt the mongrel's hands on his chest to push him away, but then Riki's fingers curled, flexed, then flattened again without pressure or rejection. The kiss

was over, almost before it began and Riki had to force himself not to follow those lips as they pulled away.

When Iason lifted his head, Riki was staring at him, somewhat dazed. "We'll agree to disagree on that matter."

Was that it? Wasn't Iason going to touch him, fondle him, something? When Iason simply continued to stare into his eyes, Riki realized that no, Iason would not make any further attempts for sex. The silent promise in the Blondie's gaze made Riki's chest hitch and he felt a layer of his resentment and fear softly peel away and drift off into oblivion.

Was this...forgiveness, he wondered? No, he wasn't ready to forgive Iason, but maybe...maybe this was...acceptance? Trust? Whatever this feeling was, he didn't want to lose his hold on it yet, and so, while the mongrel; the *pet* in him wanted to fight and hiss and spit, he instead let himself float with this thin vine of...of hope that maybe one day things wouldn't be as fucked up as they were right now. Maybe one day, he wouldn't be as angry and Iason wouldn't be as hard. Maybe... one day.

"O...okay." Riki curled into his chest, hated himself for being needy, yet unable let go of Iason in that moment.

"For now, let's both try and put it out of our minds and try to rest, hmmm?"

Riki nodded and closed his eyes, but they immediately flew open again and he moaned.

"What is it?"

"I keep seeing you burning. I don't remember you catching on fire...what little I do remember of it, but there was fire all around us. In my dreams you burn and it..."

"It frightens you?"

"Yeah."

It thrilled Iason to hear that his death scared Riki, that meant his pet did care for him, truly cared; didn't it? "Well, they are only dreams. I am here and mostly unscathed."

Iason's gentle voice, the warmth of his body and the sheer exhaustion of the last few days caught up with Riki and his eyes started to close again, this time of their own volition.

"I didn't want...you dead."

Iason was pleased to hear that at least. "Sshhhh. Sleep my sweet one. I will stay right here beside you and not allow any more dreams to harm you."

Riki had already started to drift and when Iason moved slightly to pull the sheets closer around them, Riki's hand clenched against his bicep.

"Stay."

"Always." Iason kissed the top of Riki's head and closed his eyes.

As Master and pet drifted off into what they both hoped would be a peaceful, dreamless night, a young furniture tossed and turned in his own bed, unable to get comfortable.

Cal had been sleeping beside his master for almost three weeks...now he could not settle on his own. He did not begrudge Master Riki in anyway, it was right for them to be together, only now, without Master Iason's warmth he felt a chill invade his body, despite the blankets covering him and the reasonable warmth of the weather outside; which left the inside house temperature more than comfortable.

"Cal! Settle down."

Cal stilled and glanced through the darkness to the other bed where Katze, his master's former furniture lay. "I'm sorry," he whispered meekly and forced himself to lie still, even as he shivered.

When his teeth started to chatter, Katze sat up and turned on the light. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I...I'm so sorry!" Cal also sat up and wrapped his arms around himself. "I...I believe I have become too accustomed to being in the Master's bed. I can't seem to get warm and it is too quiet and..." He shook his head, turned his back on his roommate and tried to settle again, pulling the covers up over his head. "Please just ignore me. I'll be quiet now."

Cal bit back a sigh as the light went off again, then waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness and found himself staring at the wall, as the only window was on Katze's side of the room. He heard the sound of the other bed creaking, and was startled when he felt his covers being pulled back and the weight of another pressing into his mattress.

"Um...K...Katze?"

Strong arms slid around him and the blankets returned to their original position. "It's okay, I get it. Now go to sleep."

"B...b...but what if Master Iason sees...?"

"He won't. You'll be up before him, we probably both will, now go to sleep for the love of God! I've been awake since yesterday morning."

"I...I'm so sorry."

"Don't be sorry, just sleep!"

Cal flinched and obediently closed his eyes. Almost against his will, he felt himself relaxing into the warmth of Katze's arms. He sighed and drifted off a moment later.

Riki awoke slowly, reluctantly, as Cal entered with a breakfast tray. He glanced at the clock, shocked to find he had slept the rest of the night through, undisturbed.

"Good morning, Master. Good morning, Riki." Cal waited for Iason to sit up and position himself comfortably before setting the large tray across the android's lap. "If there is anything else you would like for breakfast or to drink, please tell me."

Riki stared at the two plates of eggs, fried sausages, toast, fruit and a cup of coffee and glass of juice for each of them. "I...can eat at the table," he began as he started to slip out of the bed.

"Cal has already brought it in here, Riki," Iason countered as he sipped his juice. "It would be rude to waste his effort."

Riki looked at Cal who returned his expression, blankly. "Fine, whatever." He picked up one of the plates and repositioned himself against the headboard. "Thanks, Cal."

"Yes, thank you, Cal. I believe that will be all for now."

Cal smiled, nodded, then stepped out and closed the door behind him.

"Use a fork at least, Riki, you're not living on the streets now." Iason handed the younger man a fork when Riki picked up a piece of sausage with his fingers.

"Bite me," he retorted as he bit into the sausage, then accepted the fork.

Iason smiled and started on his own breakfast. Androids didn't need to eat, but as Jupiter had fashioned them to be as close to humans as possible, he had been given the ability to break down the food and store it for energy. It was not the same waste system as humans, but it worked conveniently enough, and besides he enjoyed the ritual and the taste of food.

"How did you sleep?"

"Okay, I guess. I don't remember having anymore dreams." In fact it was probably the best sleep he'd had since waking up from the dead.

"Nor I. I feel decidedly...refreshed."

"That will change once we start your therapy."

"Can we forgo therapy today? I feel far too content to be bothered by it."

Riki glanced at him as he sliced into his egg with his fork. "You have to do it or you won't get better."

"Surely one day will not matter."

"Well...what do you intend to do all day then?"

"I thought we might spend some time at the beach. I can sit out there and enjoy some wine and snacks and watch you and Cal swim." Iason picked up a piece of toast and added jam to it from the small crystal jar on the tray. "You did promise Cal you would take him yesterday, but your temper tantrum interceded the afternoon's activities."

"It wasn't a temper tantrum!" Riki hissed, knowing full well that was exactly what it was. "If you had kept your fucking hands to yourself we..."

Iason suddenly shoved the piece of toast he had been lathering into Riki's mouth. "Here now, before you say something you'll regret and ruin a perfectly good morning."

"Muffhr fuffer!"

"Riki! I am not in the habit of asking permission!"

Riki glared as he was forced to chew and swallow what was already in his mouth.

"Can we not just have one, pleasant day?" Iason sighed, swallowing his annoyance as he bit into one of his sausages. "I can hardly chase you down and molest you, now can I? And Katze will be here to see to my needs while you two enjoy some time in the sun. Now doesn't that sound far more inviting than quarreling and snarling at each other as we have been doing?"

Riki couldn't deny that he had been dying to dive into the water since he'd realized they were at the beach, but he'd been so preoccupied with other

things he hadn't had a chance. And he *had* been too pissed off at Iason the other day after the hot tub incident to go with Cal.

"Are you asking or telling?" he demanded, unable to concede to Iason's whims so easily.

Iason's fingers tightened on his fork and he reigned in his control. Stubborn, disrespectful, pig-headed...He would make Riki pay for this nonsense, one day, he would most assuredly make him pay.

In a voice void of any emotion he said. "Whichever will get you to agree."

Riki slowly chewed and considered. It would be nice to just forget about everything for awhile, and everyone had been working hard to help Iason recover, especially Cal. "Fine, okay. Sure."

"Good. Now, finish your breakfast."

"Don't tell me what to do."

"Don't act like a child and I will not treat you as one."

"I'm not acting like a child!"

Iason wondered if one of Jupiter's children had ever short circuited from mere frustration? It was possible he was on that very track. Instead of doing what he wanted, which was to push Riki down and make him showing him the proper way of respecting his betters, Iason shoved more food in his mouth and remained silent.

Later that morning, Iason sat in his chair on the main balcony and watched as Riki's long strides cut through the blue water with slow, easy strokes. Honestly, there was something both calming and arousing in watching his pet swim.

Cal had worn himself out trying to learn the breast stroke, and was taking a breather on the beach, settled on a towel and flat on his back, clearly exhausted from his trial. Iason had never seen the furniture in such a relaxed, vulnerable state, and marveled at it.

"Hey, Cal! Get back in here!" Riki called, as he stood up, waist high in the water and swept the moisture back from his face. "You can't learn to swim on the sand."

Cal rose obediently and plodded slowly back to the water. "I don't think I'm meant to learn to swim. It is very difficult and seems to serve no real purpose..."

"Everything's hard when you first try it," Riki stated as he slid his hands under the boy's tiny torso. "You have to practice to get better. And the purpose is exercise. It's really good exercise, now come on."

Cal started to kick his feet and move his arms as he had seen in the video he watched. "How did....uuhh.... you learn.... to swim?"

"Some guys threw me into a lake when I was eight, and it was either swim or drown."

Cal's feet dropped down, shocked. "What?" he demanded, aghast. "Why did they do that?"

"They wanted me to do something for them and I refused, so they knocked me around and tossed me in."

"Weren't you frightened?"

"A little, but then I just got pissed. Anger's a great motivator for survival."

Riki squeezed Cal's ribs, to remind the boy to keep practicing, and accidentally tickled him in the process, causing the boy to release a surprised squeal.

"*What* was that?"

"I...I don't know!" Cal flushed to his toes. "I am so, so sorry! That was horribly undignified and I..."

"Relax!" Riki smirked. "Haven't you ever been tickled before?"

"Tickled? What does that mean?"

Fuck me, really? Riki shot a glare at Iason, then turned his attention back to Cal. "Never mind, we'll practice that later too."

"Please, tell me what it means, Riki?"

"It...it's just a way of touching someone to make them laugh."

There was a counselor at Guardian that was actually quite kind and loved to tickle the kids and get them laughing. He also used to sneak the younger ones candy. Riki had forgotten about him until now, had never considered having any good memories of that place.

"What is its purpose?"

"Just..." Riki let Cal sink to his feet again and scratched his neck. Purpose? Cal had mentioned before about needing a purpose and he wondered about that. "Can...Can I ask you a question, Cal?"

"Of course!"

"How did you become furniture?"

"As all furniture do," Cal replied quietly. "I was selected out of a group of children and made it through the qualification process."

"Were you forced to join?"

"Not...forced, exactly. We were encouraged to join by the Onyxes but we could, at any time before the initial testing, decline the position."

"Then why didn't you decline?"

Cal got a faraway look in his eyes. "Life was...difficult. I believed it would be better to serve an Elite than to live...as I was and I was right. Master Iason can be a hard master, but he is better than my last one."

"How is he better?"

"He acknowledges me," Cal replied simply.

It was of course, normal for furniture to be treated as indirectly by their masters as possible. To the Elites, the young servants were no better than an inanimate object or house droid. Riki would never have survived being treated so insignificantly and it hurt his heart to think that Cal had.

"Is that all?"

"That is more than enough for one such as me."

"Don't talk about yourself that way, Cal. You're just as important as anyone else."

Cal flushed.

"Did you have any family?"

"I had an older sister."

"Really?" Women were so rare in Ceres, he was surprised that he wondered if Cal knew how blessed he had been. "Then why did you leave her?"

"I didn't. They made her go live in one of the big houses at the top of King's Row. They said she would be treated well, but they lied. The man they paired her with brutalized her daily, allowed his friends mate with her as well, but she was bound by the law to stay there because she was female. She tried to come back for me a few times, but in the end, she died, of unhappiness, I think."

"I'm sorry, Cal." Riki offered quietly. Cal's voice held no emotion as he spun his tale, and Riki could see why the kid had chosen to purge sentiment; a discipline he had never had the patience, or perhaps intense need to learn. "I'm just trying to understand."

"I know, and I thank you for your interest, Riki."

No one had ever shown any interest in him before, not even when he was still living in Ceres. Even his sister only ever asked a few dutiful questions,

but then she was so much older than he.

Cal looked up at Riki. "May I also ask a question?"

"Sure."

"Why did you come back?"

"From the dead?"

"To Master Iason. There were many rumors after I joined his house about his pet slum mongrel, some that he had freed you, some that he had disposed of you. Then...suddenly you were back I was...surprised that you were so old, for a pet I mean."

"Yeah, me too."

"Then why?"

Riki didn't want to go into the whole thing about Guy and his gang, so he said. "I'm his pet right? I had to come back."

"But now you are free, yet you're still here."

"Yeah."

"Is it because you care for the Master, Riki?"

"I don't even fucking know any more, Cal." Riki sighed as his gaze drifted up the beach towards the Blondie on the balcony. "I just...for whatever reason I can't seem to make myself leave yet."

"I think it is because you have a good heart. You know that the Master needs you and that's why you stay." Cal touched Riki's arm. "I'm glad you came back." The Master was much nicer when Riki was with him and far more forgiving of any mistakes. "I'm glad you stayed. I am just furniture, and my opinion means nothing, but still, I'm glad."

"Your opinion means something to me, Cal." He watched the boy flush with pleasure then nudged him to lay flat and float again on his chest. "Come on, swim fishy, swim."

"I am trying! I think... I enjoy... cooking mo...glub!"

"Don't swallow the water!"

"It's trying to swallow me!"

A bark of amusement bolted up from Riki's throat before he could stop it.

Iason felt a shiver of pleasure shoot through his body at the sound of Riki's laughter and he sat forward in his chair, as if mentally urging his pet to do it again. What had caused him to do that? He could only barely make out some of what they were saying.

"Iason?"

Iason turned to Katze. "Did you hear that?" he demanded. "Did you hear Riki laugh?"

"Uh...no." Katze regarded the Blondie curiously. "But he's laughed before, no big deal, right?"

Iason slumped, actually physically slumped back in his chair. "Not with me. Never with me. I have never heard that sound until just now."

Well, shit, Katze thought, and felt a well of sympathy for both his master. No wonder Iason was so out of joint when it came to Riki; the guy never even laughed around him? Granted, Riki could be a sullen, brooding son of a bitch most of the time, but they'd shared a few laughs while they had worked together. Or they had in the beginning anyway, before Riki became Iason's pet.

He tried to remember if Riki had laughed the second time he had come back to work for him and couldn't recall a single instance. Did that mean that Riki had not smiled or laughed for four years? That was messed up!

"I...guess he hasn't had much to be happy about," Katze offered quietly.

"You think I should just let him be as well? Everyone seems to be of the opinion he is a waste of effort, that I would do better without him and he without me."

"You've a leader, not a follower. You've always done what you think is best, regardless of the opinions of others, so what do you think?"

Iason's sharpened his gaze so he could focus on Riki, bring his image closer. "Perhaps he would do better, but I cannot live without him, Katze. I love him and it seems to be an unforgiving and unforgettable emotion."

"Yeah, it can be a bitch alright." Katze held up a cigarette and Iason nodded, so he lit it, before settling in one of the chairs. "You'll get there," he offered kindly. "The kid just needs more time, more...proof of what you feel for him."

"I do not know what more I can give, Katze. What more I can do that I have not already done. He still restrains himself around me, refuses to allow me to see all that he is, all that he feels." Iason hit the arm rest of his chair. "It is beyond frustrating."

Katze didn't know what other advice he could give to his master, matters of the heart were really not his forte and there was still that line of furniture and master that he tried not to cross too often with Iason. He still respected that boundary.

"Were you able to see to my requests?"

"Yes. Everything has been arranged as you asked. I've some people in Tanagura with eyes on the syndicate. The rumors we started about your revival are taking root."

"And the consensus is?"

Katze took a long drag on his cigarette, then noticed that Iason's tea was empty and rose to pour him another from the heated pot Cal had left on the

table. "Raoul, Courtice, and Jyles seem interested in the idea and are searching for more information on the rumor's validity. Orphe, Gideon and most of the other Blondies are trying to tramp down on the rumor; insisting that it is false."

"Orphe has taken my place as Jupiter's first, has he not?"

Katze nodded. "Oh yeah, jumped in with both feet, you could say."

"He has always been after my position; he is a very ambitious Blondie. I knew that Raoul would be pleased that I might return, despite our past differences, we have been friends for many years."

"Well, considering that no one really knows the true story of why you and Riki were even at Dana Burn, I am wondering if it's more a need for closure for him."

"So, I may be welcomed back, but there will, of course, be some resistance." Iason sipped his tea. "In the end it is for Jupiter to decide, they will not go against her wishes and if she chooses not to disclose the reason for my disappearance or assumed death, we must trust her judgement and do the same."

"It's been almost a year," Katze reminded. "A lot has changed. Orphe has dictated a new set of pet regulations; I think to spite the relationship you had with Riki, to be honest. One of the rules is that no pets can be kept outside of those from standard breeding, or approved factories."

Iason merely smiled as he watched Riki toss Cal up and into the water, the boy who so rarely showed his young age squealed again, this time in delight, before resurfacing with a sputter. "Orphe wanted Riki for his own, wanted me to allow him to breed with one of his pets and I refused. He is quite the hypocrite really."

"Will he go back with you?"

"Unknown, as yet. I don't think, even if Riki does decide to stay, I don't think it would be prudent for him to return with me to Tanagura. I think it

would be better for him, for everyone, if they continue to believe he is dead; at least for a little while longer."

"So...what are you gonna do with him?"

"I haven't decided yet."

Katze nodded, turned his attention toward the water as Cal ran out onto the sand and flopped down, Riki close behind him, grinning. "Um....Riki mentioned...maybe coming back to work for me. If...I mean, as an option."

Iason nodded. "Yes. He is very good at that work and it would give him a purpose, but he cannot go back with you as Riki. He'd be noticed far too quickly."

"Not necessarily. No one knew he was your pet before, in Apatia."

"Hmmm....something to think about. There is also the matter of whether Riki will make good his threat and leave when I am recovered."

Katze phrased his next question delicately. "Are you...okay with that?"

Iason sipped his tea, thoughtfully. "No need to stand on ceremony with me, Katze. We have known each other many years, speak your mind."

"Okay, fine. Are you going to allow Riki to leave?"

"No." Iason had made that decision after hearing Riki laugh. He wanted to hear that sound again, wanted to experience a number of new things with his pet. "Therefore we have to convince him that he wants to stay."

"If you try to manipulate him it will just piss him off more, Iason."

"I am aware." He looked at the red-head. "So, help me, Katze. Help me to win Riki's heart, to make him easy enough that he will laugh for me, stay with me, and I will reward you with anything you wish."

Katze stared at him, dumbfounded. "I...I don't need anything, Iason. You've given me more than I could ever hope to have and...I'll do anything you ask

of me, but I...Riki's hurt and angry and really bull-headed. This won't be an easy fix."

"He is yes." Iason paused. "Anything I ask." Suddenly, he turned, smiled at Katze, for the very first time really smiled at him and the red-head felt his heart leap into his throat. "Therefore I will not ask as your master, Katze," he said as he held out his hand. "Will you do it as my friend?"

At first, Katze was too stunned to move, and then he found himself taking Iason's hand, shaking it. "Y...yes. I will do whatever I can, as...as your friend."

"That is fine then." Iason turned back to watch his beloved and Cal frolic on the sand.

Chapter 18

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki and Iason have dinner to discuss the hard truth of their relationship

Iason was looking very debonair in a white slacks and tunic with green adornments and cuffs. He adjusted the lapels of his tunic as Katze, who had helped him to dress, picked up his cloak.

"We needn't go that formal."

Katze nodded and set the cloak aside, then picked up a brush and began to smooth out Iason's long hair.

"How do I look?"

"Like a man on a mission," Katze returned.

"Indeed." Iason pulled at his collar, why did it feel so tight? He usually didn't mind the rounded collars at his throat, but today it was irritating him. "I don't want to wear this one. Give me the dark blue with the red shoulders."

Katze set the brush down and went to the closet, trying not to smile. This would be Iason's third change in the last half hour. "I thought you found it too dark?"

"No, no. It will be fine. The collar on this one is bothersome."

Katze returned and once again assisted in Iason in changing. "Bottoms and top?"

"No, just the top." Iason had already shrugged out of the other tunic, he could do that much himself at least. He could not wait to be free from this

cursed chair!

As he slid his arms into the blue tunic and Katze began to fasten it around him, he wondered what this strange, uneasy feeling inside him was? It had started a couple of hours ago and seemed to worsen as the time toward dinner grew closer. It felt similar to the one he had when Riki had gone missing after Guy had kidnapped him. As no one but a select few knew that he and Riki were alive, he could not assign this feeling to the same situation. Therefore, what in the world could it be?

"Nervous?"

Iason glanced at him. "Pardon me?"

"Are you nervous?"

"You are well aware that I am incapable of such a foolish sentiment, Katze." Wasn't he? Was that what his weird tingling in his brain was? A case of nerves?

He could not deny that when Katze had suggested this intimate dinner for two between him and Riki he had been rather reluctant. It was not as though he and Riki had not dined together before, many times in fact, but aside from eating there was very little else to claim it a worthy endeavor. Iason did not see how this would be an important step towards winning Riki's heart.

His eyes flicked towards the curtain that hid a selection of screens that had been set up in his room. "Is Riki still here?"

Iason was also not at all sure that Katze's insistence of no longer monitoring Riki while inside the house was a valid one. At least when Iason could see his pet on the monitors he knew Riki still nearby and safe. It seemed almost impossible to rid himself of the worry that Riki might be taken from him again, and being able to observe him, even if it was just to smoke or sleep or interact with Cal, gave him a sense of relief and security. He also did not want to wake to find his slum mongrel had fled; as he had a couple of weeks previously.

"Yes. He agreed to have dinner with you, remember?"

"He could change his mind. He's always changing his mind. I never know what he is thinking."

Katze wondered how Iason thought always watching Riki on the monitor screens would change that. "That's why you're having dinner together; to talk about what he is feeling. What you are both feeling."

"I don't understand the point of it. Riki is aware how I feel for him, why must we continue to discuss it?"

"He knows you want his body, he doesn't think you want his heart."

"That's ridiculous. Have I not done enough to show him that I want both?"

Katze picked up the brush again. "You asked for my advice and I have given it. If you want to end this now, say so."

Iason huffed. "I have tried this method before, if you must know," he murmured, recalling their dinner on the balcony after he had gotten rid of Diman. "It did not go well."

Katze remained silent and continued to brush Iason's hair.

"Speak your mind, Katze."

"I have nothing particular to say."

Iason released a sardonic laugh. "Of all people, *you* must not lie to me, Katze. You believe I went about the matter incorrectly? If so, what did I do wrong?"

"I wasn't there so could not say..."

"Katze!"

"Maybe...because you always think about getting him into bed, before anything else, and that came through in the dinner."

"That was not it at all! Riki was being completely unreasonable and I..." Certainly they'd ended up having sex, but that was only because Riki had made him angry. "He is my pet, and having sex with him is my right. It should not matter one way or the other as to whether a dinner is successful because of it."

Katze did not bother to remind Iason that he was the only Elite who actually had sex with his pet, but he could hear the faintest tint of remorse in his master's voice, and was stunned by it.

Iason turned his head and glared at Katze when the man continued to silently brush his hair without further comment. "Is this what you call helping?"

"Nope." Katze smirked. "This is what I call keeping my way of life." He set the brush down and leaned against the wall in front of Iason. "It's because of you taking what is your right that has Riki so adamant not to be taken again. If you keep pushing him for sex he will keep jumping back."

"He enjoys it! Why does he deny himself, us both when it is so obviously what we both desire?"

Katze shrugged, he had a theory, but wasn't yet ready to share it. He believed the main reason Riki kept denying their physical relationship was probably because, for the first time in four years, he could say no and have it actually mean something. He'd gained some control over his relationship with Iason and Katze was pretty sure that Riki was testing those boundaries daily. He still did not trust the Blondie to keep his word. He did not believe what control he had gained wouldn't be snatched away again.

"Maybe.... he's ashamed, Iason."

Iason scoffed. "A pet has no need of shame." He had beaten the shame out of Riki years ago. "Why would he feel that way?"

"Because before he was a pet he was a very proud slum mongrel. Before he became your property he was his own man."

"A man who offered himself to me on the street the very day we met."

"I never said he was sensible or even logical, but he does feel shame, Iason."

Katze was aware of this only through his talks with Riki while they worked together. It was not what Riki had said, it was what had been left unsaid and the general bitterness in the words that had been allowed to air.

"He feels shame because, I think deep down, he cares about you. He probably does like how you make him feel in bed, but having no reference for sex myself I can only assume that's true."

Iason turned his hover-chair to regard Katze quietly. "Is that a decision you've come to regret, Katze?"

Katze shrugged. "I won't deny that if I had been told that I would have to be castrated to become a furniture I would have considered my options more thoroughly, but what is done is done. I can't miss what I've never known, but that doesn't mean I can't see the connection you and Riki have through sex."

"It is not just sex that I want with him, Katze. I...There is so much more I wish to share with him and in order to do that I must be assured that he is completely mine. I believed that was the case when he returned for me in Dana Burn, but now he has reverted to being sullen and belligerent again and withholding himself from me."

"I know, and I get why you think that, but you have to understand that for humans to have a proper relationship there has to be more than just you taking what you want and him giving what he can't freely hold onto. It can't be just him becoming yours, you...you have to become his as well."

Iason's eyebrows rose. "You wish me to be a pet to Riki?"

"No, not like that. Look, just take that word out of your vocabulary for awhile and consider this. If you weren't an Elite of Tanagura, say you were

living in the slums or in Midas or somewhere instead, and you saw Riki on the street and wanted to be with him, what would you do?"

"I would make him mine."

Katze tried not to sigh. "Okay, but how would you convince him to make him yours? What if he didn't want to go with you?"

"I would simply take him, as I did before and train him."

"But what if you couldn't do that, Iason? What if you were just a regular slum mongrel too?"

The concept did not even compute for Iason, he could not be someone who he wasn't. "I fail to see the relevance of such a farce."

"What if you weren't a rich Son of Jupiter and head of the Tanagura Syndicate? For instance, I can tell you right now that if you didn't possess the unusual strength you do, Riki the Dark would have kicked your ass in a heartbeat."

Iason smiled a little at the thought. "I have no doubts he would be quite formidable."

"Okay, so if you were just another regular guy and there was no one to do your bidding, how would you approach him? You couldn't just kidnap him off the street you'd be arrested."

"Don't be preposterous, no one would ever arrest an Elite."

Katze ran his hands over his face, the Blondie just wasn't getting it. "Never mind."

"No, continue. I am intrigued by what you are saying, however I cannot be someone I am not, so it is difficult for me to understand the meaning behind such words. If this is something I am required to know to make Riki mine then you must help me to understand."

Katze tried another approach and wondered how in the hell he had become some kind of shrink to an Elite? "Why do you want to make Riki yours?"

"Because I want him."

"You want him?"

"Yes."

"And you always get what you want." Katze knew the answer to that one without Iason having to reply.

"I love him, Katze. Is that what you wish to hear?"

"Why do you love him, Iason?"

He had heard Riki ask this question many times before, understood that it was a particularly sore spot with the mongrel. Riki just didn't understand why Iason wanted him. Maybe if he did, maybe if Iason could explain it better, both of them could move forward.

"Now you sound like Riki."

"It's a valid question and one I know disturbs him."

"Why should it disturb him? Isn't loving him reason enough?"

"Not for him."

Iason sighed. "This is getting far too complicated."

"Love ain't for the faint of heart."

"Indeed. I cannot explain myself further, Katze, as this is a new feeling for me as well. I simply do not wish to be without him. I cannot be without him. As to the reasons, well...Again I am not sure of them myself. Riki is beautiful; he responds in ways no other pet has ever responded to me. I enjoy hearing his moans of pleasure as well as his cries of pain." Although he did know the line of where to stop, he would never seriously injure his

beloved pet. "He makes me...feel things I have never felt before. He engages me, challenges me, provokes me and delights me and I want more of those feelings. Is that not love?"

Katze supposed it was, in a way. "So why don't you try telling him all of that, Iason?"

Iason paused, considered the idea and immediately rejected it. He had to maintain some control over his pet, after all. To reveal such intimate details would be a weakness and he could not be shown as weak; not to Riki. "That would be impossible."

"Why?"

"It simply would, Katze."

"Well, you'll have to figure out something to talk about over dinner, or are you just gonna sit there and ignore each other as you have been doing?"

"I won't deny that the few times Riki and I actually had a proper discussion, I rather enjoyed it, yet he is so difficult to gage, Katze. I never know what will set him off and make him angry again."

Katze knew what that meant too, if Iason couldn't read Riki he couldn't control the discussion either. "I'm sure he feels the same way about you."

"I haven't been angry with him in quite some time."

"You're angry with him now, because he won't submit to your demands; because your relationship hasn't continued from what it was before. You think he doesn't know that?"

Iason pondered Katze's words. "Why can he not just be my pet? Why does he have to act up the way he does?"

"You wouldn't want him if he was docile, Iason."

"Yes. That is the truth of it." Iason sighed and glanced at his reflection in the mirror. "Whatever *will* we talk about?"

"About what you both want and need, just...try not to pressure him."

Iason nodded. "Well then, for better or worse, let's get this farce over with."

As Iason and Katze deliberated the evening upstairs, Riki was in his bedroom downstairs staring at his reflection in a tall mirror as he pulled on the dinner jacket that Cal had set out for him. He grimaced; he looked ridiculous in this outfit. Well, at least it was black, except for his shirt which was white. He still looked like an idiot.

He would have laughed it off, only Katze had promised that there was a carton of cigarettes in it for him if he would have this special dinner with Iason; and dress for the occasion.

"I don't understand what the big deal is," he muttered. "It's just a meal right? If he thinks were gonna have sex then he's dead wrong."

"I do not believe that is the Master's intent, Riki." Cal stepped back, smiled at the striking image the mongrel made. He did clean up quite nicely. "You seem nervous, Riki?"

Riki shrugged. He was a little nervous. Aside from therapy he had tried to avoid being alone with Iason, and although they were back to sharing a bed, they were not having sex. Iason had not once tried to touch him beyond the requirement for therapy or just holding him in his arms at night.

His dreams had not stopped completely, but having Iason beside him when he woke lessened the fear and anxiety and allowed him to go back to sleep at least. Iason seemed to be sleeping better as well, as long as he was allowed to hold Riki in his arms every night.

He was constantly aware of Iason, especially whenever they were close together, and he couldn't help the responding arousal he felt just being near the man who had trained his body to respond in ways that he had previously believed impossible. His resolve was growing weaker, because it had been

weeks since he had been properly touched. It was no longer about trusting Iason, it was more that he was trusting himself less.

"Maybe," he admitted.

"Shall I tell you a story, then?" Cal suggested as he stepped up to brush down the lapels of his jacket.

"Sure." Anything to get his mind off of spending an evening alone with Iason. Was this really just going to be dinner or would they end up fucking on the table? Riki wasn't sure which one he preferred at this stage and part of him, a very small part, wished that the choice could be taken out of his hands; as it had so many times before.

"Once, before I came to be furniture, my sister gave me a fish she had caught out of the river. It was the prettiest thing I had ever seen, and I couldn't believe it had come from that foul, smelly river. It had thin, almost transparent fins and a slick orange belly. Its head was this strange multicolor that changed shades depending on the light and he had these two huge eyes on each side of his head. Everyone else said he was ugly and funny looking and silly, but I thought he was beautiful and no one could tell me any different."

"Cal..." Riki suspected where this was going and he was not in the mood to hear it.

"You said I could tell you the story, Riki."

"Fine." Riki sighed as Cal set down the lapel brush and picked up a hair brush. He snatched it from the boy and turned towards the mirror. "I can brush my own damn hair."

Cal nodded serenely and moved to move the clothes Riki had discarded from earlier to the laundry bin. "Well, I didn't know very much about fish, I was so young, and the people at Guardian didn't allow pets so I had to keep him a secret. But I read up on them when I could, I found a bowl to keep him in and put some rocks in it, fish like to sleep in rocks." Cal shot Riki a

shy smile. "I fed him crumbs of my food, whenever I managed to get any, and talked to him and such. I even gave him a name, Copper."

Riki smirked as he met Cal's gaze in the mirror, it was certainly something a kid would come up with. "So, what happened to him?"

"He died."

Riki figured that much, and it just proved his point really, that you shouldn't keep something wild in a fishbowl. "Do you know why?"

"Yes. I didn't love him enough."

"Cal..." Riki set the brush down and turned to the furniture. Really? How could Cal think that? "That had nothing to do with it. Fish belong in the river. They need to be free."

"I thought so too." Cal picked up the brush and ran a cleansing cloth over it, one that sucked out all the stray hairs. "Every day, all day he'd swim around that small bowl, like he was looking for a way out, and sometimes he would just float there and stare at me with such sadness my heart broke."

So the fish died of unhappiness, Riki could relate. "I'm sorry, Cal." Even though the story validated his point of view on pets, he could tell that it had been hard on the kid. "Something's aren't meant to be tamed."

"I agree and that was why I took him back to the river and set him free."

Riki blinked. "You...you did?"

"Yes." Cal set the brush back on the bureau then ran a hand over the bed sheets to smooth them out. "I wanted him to love me, to need me as much as I loved and needed him, but he couldn't. So, I took him to the river and released him." Cal's somber gaze lifted to Riki's. "Almost the moment he was in the water again a larger fish came and ate him."

Riki gasped. Oh shit! Shit. "Cal, I..." What could he say to that?

He supposed that he resembled the fish more than he cared too. Iason had released him back into the slums, where life was far more dangerous, but at least he had been free and could protect himself. He probably could have been eaten at any time as well, if a bigger, stronger fish decided to make him prey, but that was the cycle of life after all.

"I know you don't like to be a pet, Riki. You find it degrading and restricting, and I suppose it is, but having once owned a pet, I can tell you that I didn't keep Copper to make him unhappy or to deny him his freedom. I wanted to take care of him, I wanted his life to be better than the life I thought he had in that stinking river." Cal sighed and looked away. "I was so very lonely and I wanted him to love me as much as I loved him, but I didn't know how to make him do that, I was too young and inexperienced."

"You were a kid, Cal." Riki fully understood what the boy was trying to say, the references he was making. "Iason isn't. He is fully aware of what he does and the consequences."

"Yes, but in some ways I think he is just as lonely and inexperienced when it comes to caring for others." Cal turned back and held Riki's gaze. "Androids are created to act like humans, to learn and process and evolve, but they are not human. I don't think the Master ever meant to hurt you or make you unhappy, he just didn't know any better. He just..." Cal worried his small hands. "He just wanted you to love him."

Riki blinked, stunned. Could that be true? Was Iason capable of real love? Was he, a belligerent slum mongrel even capable of feeling such a complex and frightening emotion? "He just wants to control me, Cal; to lick his boots and warm his bed. That's all he wants from me."

"He could have any pet do that, Riki. Any other pet would be happy to, but he chose you."

Riki sat up, fisted his hair. "But why? Why does he have to want me? I...I just don't get it!"

"Oh, Riki." Cal stepped up and smoothed down the mess Riki had just made. "You had it looking so nice."

It was not normal for furniture to have such a discussion with anyone like Riki, and yet here they were. Riki did not treat him as others did; Riki considered his thoughts and feelings and showed his appreciation for all the hard work he did. Even now, despite his earlier declaration and ongoing stubbornness of not being taken care of, the mongrel dipped his head to let Cal repair the damage his fingers had done.

"There, that's better," Cal decided and stepped back. "Why not you?"

"Huh?"

"You asked why you," Cal reminded calmly. "I said, why not you?"

"I'm just a street rat from Ceres. There is nothing special about me."

Cal stared at him, stunned. Did Riki actually believe that? "How can you say that, Riki? You are incredibly unique!"

Again Riki stared at him, bewildered.

"You don't accept the barriers society has set in place. You won't admit to being less than anyone else is and you fight for what you want, what you believe is right. You are beautiful, Riki."

Riki watched the tinge of pink flood Cal's cheeks and smirked. "Yeah, right. Well, we see what being a pretty boy has done for me."

"I don't mean your face." Cal placed a hesitant hand against Riki's heart. "I mean in here. You...You know who you are, what you are and you make no apology. You're kind to those that need it." He lifted his face to meet Riki's gaze so the older man would understand that he was including himself in that group." And you are cruel to those who deserve it. There....There's a light about you, Riki, an aura that everyone feels whenever you are near. It's...warm and intriguing and...captivating."

Both males blushed, and Cal realized he had gone too far.

He stumbled backwards. "F...Forgive me. I am being too forward. I shouldn't have said all of that. I only meant to...to make you feel better. It's

a furniture's place to keep their master's happy and I don't like...I mean you shouldn't be..." Oh dear! Oh dear, oh dear!

Riki shuffled his feet, also suddenly shy as he tried to think of something to say.

Cal recovered first. "I will leave you to finish as I have some things to attend to. Please do not change your clothes."

Relieved to have something to bitch about instead of feeling embarrassed Riki retorted. "I said I'd wear the stupid thing and I'm wearing it." He paused. "Do I have time for a smoke?"

"I believe so, yes."

"Good." Another pause. "Um...Cal?" he said as the boy reached the doorway of his room. "I...I do feel better."

Cal shyly smiled, stepped out and closed the door behind him.

Riki grabbed his almost empty pack of cigarettes and his lighter and slid back the screen door on his balcony. He stepped out breathed in the evening air and lit his cigarette.

He wasn't sure what was behind this whole dinner thing, but both Katze and Cal had pestered him to do it. Wasn't it enough that he was now sleeping in Iason's bed and helping him with therapy, he had to play dress up and pretend he and Iason were some kind of couple? He didn't understand it at all.

Cal lit the last two candles on the small dinner table that was set for two, then took a quick glance around to make sure he hadn't missed any details. There was a roaring fire in the hearth, a trio of candles on the mantle above it, along with an assortment of others strategically placed around the room. The shades were pulled back on the tall windows to allow the glow of the full moon to join with the flickering flames.

He nodded, satisfied, then moved to the wall and programmed the music that his master had requested. A slow, jazzy tune filled the room.

"Is everything ready, Cal?" Iason entered in his hover chair.

"It is all as you have requested, Master." Cal hurried to assist Iason into a chair at the table, then programmed his chair to move to the corner out of the way. "Shall I bring in the wine?"

"No, we'll start with the Bryndini and coffees."

Cal nodded and went out as Riki entered.

Iason's gaze stayed on the well dressed mongrel as the young man hovered in the doorway. Riki looked good enough to eat! "You look very nice, Riki."

Riki grunted and stepped into the room. "Cal picked it out. It's not really my style."

"Well, it suits you just the same." Although Iason would much rather see his pet naked, but there was time enough for that. He recalled Katze's words about going into the dinner with the desire for sex and tried to turn his mind elsewhere. "I believe that Cal has prepared a Brou de Gras, which I believe is some sort of braised meat and assorted vegetables for our dinner."

"Okay." Riki was hardly a connoisseur of fine food, despite living with Iason for all this time. Refusing to wipe his suddenly damp hands on his slacks he stepped to the table and sat down in the only available chair.

Cal returned, breaking the awkward silence between them as he set two cups of coffee on the table and then picked up a familiar looking bottle.

"Woah!" Riki put his hand over his cup. "I don't want any of that. Remember what happened last time?"

"I do indeed." Iason smiled at the memory of a dancing and singing Riki. "However, that was because you gulped it down like water. A drop or two in our coffee will just add to the flavor and will not get you drunk, I assure you."

Cal regarded Riki patiently as he stood by the table holding the thin bottle.

"Whatever." Riki pulled his hand away and watched the gold liquid dribble smoothly into his coffee. He took a cautious sip and blinked at how good it tasted. "Yeah, okay, it's good."

"I'm thrilled you approve."

Riki did not miss the dryness of Iason's tone and he glared at him. "Can we just get this over with?"

"Cal, I believe our guest is hungry. You may serve the meal."

Cal nodded and stepped out of the room to the adjoining kitchen.

"How's it going?" Katze asked, smoking as he leaned against the counter and watched Cal set the two covered meals on a rolling tray.

"I worry about giving Master Riki any sharp silverware."

Katze chuckled and helped Cal add the other essentials to the cart. "Well, we both know how to patch them up, right?"

Cal sighed heavily then straightened and wheeled the cart out, with Katze close behind. When they arrived it seemed that neither Iason nor Riki had made any further move to speak. Iason was staring at Riki and Riki was glaring out the window.

Cal set their food before them, removed the covers, then added their salads and a small pot of hot coffee to the table.

"What's that for?" Riki asked, because usually Cal just hovered to top up their drinks.

"You can serve yourselves for one night, right?" Katze said as Cal wheeled the cart out and he placed a small covered bowl by each of their coffee cups. "If you get bored, try this." With that he turned and walked out, closing the door behind him.

Riki pulled the lid off his bowl, thinking it was candy or something, and found inside a dozen or so digi-sticks. "What the hell?"

Iason selected a stick from the bowl closest to him and raised an eyebrow. "They're questions."

"I can see that, but why?"

"I assume we are to take turns asking and answering them."

Riki put the stick he had picked back in the bowl. So stupid. "Yeah, not happening."

"No indeed." Secretly, Iason thought the idea ingenious. He set the digi-stick he had selected by his plate and picked up his knife and fork. "We hardly need to resort to such tactics when we are already having such a stimulating conversation."

Riki sliced his meat. "Shut up." He shoved the meat into his mouth and chewed, angrily.

What the hell was this? Was Katze trying to set the mood or some such thing? Was this where they were both supposed to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness? What a crock of shit.

"I understand you are considering going back to work for Katze?"

Riki shrugged and popped a red vegetable into his mouth, having no idea what it was. "Maybe."

"Well, I could arrange for you to have that same apartment if you like, or perhaps a better one..."

"No."

"Well, you'll need somewhere to live, Riki, and..."

"I may not work for Katze. I may just go back to Ceres."

Iason's fingers tightened on his knife, but his expression remained calm. "Why would you want to do that? There is nothing there for you anymore."

Riki shrugged. "Maybe not, but at least I know my way around. I could manage on my own there."

The idea of Riki going back to that one room hovel he had found him living in during his year of freedom infuriated Iason. Why? Why would he chose to live in squalor with no money and surrounded by thieves, rapists and junkies? "You do not belong there."

"Where do you think I belong, Iason?" Riki asked, quietly as he pushed his food around on his plate. "With you?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"You know why, Riki."

"Because I'm your pet."

"Because you are..." Iason searched for a way to express the proper sentiment. "We are good together, Riki. You cannot deny our chemistry..."

"Chemistry."

Riki closed his eyes for a moment at the dull ache that pierced his heart. It always came down to sex, didn't it? That really was all he was good for to Iason. No, he couldn't deny their chemistry, but there had to be more, didn't

there? Even with Guy he had more than just the sex; they had trust and warmth and memories.

"You can get another pet."

Iason dropped his fork on his plate and sat back, rigidly. "I do not want another, Riki. I want only you."

"But you set me free, right?"

Again he was tossing that out. Never before had Iason come to regret a single decision of his. Never before had it been so harshly used against him. They just kept going around in circles. "Is that truly what you want, Riki?"

Riki shrugged, took a sip of his coffee, stared down at his food. He didn't fucking know what he wanted anymore. Fuck the cigarettes, he couldn't do this. "I'm not very hungry." He pushed his plate away and rose.

"Riki!" Iason reached out, caught Riki's wrist. "Stay. We must settle this."

Riki knew it would be a waste of effort to try and shake off Iason's grip, so instead he just kept his eyes on the door, rather than meet Iason's gaze. "What do you want me to say?"

"Whatever you wish to say, just stop running!"

"You think I'm running? If I were doing that I would already be gone don't you think?"

"You are right." Iason sighed and slowly released Riki's hand. "You are still here and I am glad for that. Now, can we please sit and have a proper meal?"

Riki sat down and picked up his fork, but he really wasn't hungry anymore. After several long minutes of uncomfortable silence as they ate their meals, he watched Iason pick up the stick by his plate.

"Is there any place you have ever dreamed of going?"

Riki looked up at him, blinked. Seriously? "Are you actually asking or is that on the stick?"

"It's on the stick."

Riki shrugged. "Not really." Just out of Ceres, that had been his main goal. He had always just wanted to get out of Ceres and go anywhere else, yet that dream became a very cruel and complicated reality. There were places that were worse than Ceres. "New Earth, maybe."

"Really?" Iason asked surprised. New Earth was so crowded and almost as polluted as its predecessor. Some species just failed to learn from their mistakes. "Why?"

"Dunno. Somewhere different, I guess." Through the Black Market one could get wav files from Earth, music, broadcasts of something called television, or books and other items that were considered foreign or outlawed here. "I've heard some food they have that sounds interesting."

"What sort of food?"

Another shrug as Riki popped the final piece of meat into his mouth. "Just stuff. There is something called pizea that sounds like it might be good. It's supposed to be this baked bread with sauce and different things on it."

"Perhaps you can ask Cal if he knows how to make it? I am sure he could find out how."

"Hmmm...maybe."

Another long silence dropped between them and a knock at the door preceded Cal's entrance. He removed their finished dinners and presented them with a pie for desert, then stepped out again.

Riki poured himself another cup of coffee, paused, then topped up Iason's. He added a shot of Bryndini to each, then reached for his covered bowl and took a stick. What the hell, right?

"Who is your closest friend?" Riki rolled his eyes at the lame question and honestly did not expect Iason to answer.

"Raoul used to be," Iason admitted frankly, catching Riki off guard. "However our tastes have drifted in different directions recently so we are not as close as we once were."

"Because of me?"

"No, he simply prefers order to chaos and tradition to new ideals. Being unable to accept my feelings for you is part of that unwillingness to change." Iason pushed away his untouched piece of pie, sat back and sipped his coffee. "None of them understand it, really. There are times when even I do not completely understand it."

To say that Riki was shocked at Iason's admission was an understatement. "*You...*don't understand it?" How was that possible? Iason decided everything in their relationship, he had all the control. How could he not understand something that he made all the choices for?

"There are times that I think I do, however, there are just as many times when I am confused by what I feel. I can fully comprehend why my associates are against having you as my pet, it was not so very long ago that I felt the same way, however things have changed and so too must I. It is difficult to explain my reason to them when I do not fully comprehend them myself."

Riki digested this information quietly, letting it sink into his heart and float around his already befuddled brain.

"What is your first recollection?"

Riki glanced up. "Huh?"

Iason waved the next stick he had selected.

"Oh." Were they really going to play this weird ass game?

Sliding his fork into the pie, he removed a small piece and slid it between his lips, needing something to occupy himself. His first memory.

"Darkness."

"Darkness?" Iason repeated, curious.

"Yeah. I remember...being somewhere cold and dark and there was this...smell." It was a sweet smell, not sugary but soft and light and floral. He loved that smell, although he had never found out what it was.

He shivered slightly at the memory he hadn't thought about in years, yet could never completely forget. "I could feel warm hands on me, wrapping something around me. I couldn't see, I don't who it was or where I was or even when."

"You grew up in a juvenile center, did you not?"

"Yeah."

"Were you placed in care or found?"

Again Riki shrugged. "No idea. They weren't big on telling kids where they came from, don't think any of them cared really, but I know I had a mother once."

"How do you know?"

Because of the smell. It just smelled to Riki like what a mother should smell like. "I remember someone singing, a woman. Who else could that be if not my mother?"

Intrigued Iason leaned forward. "Do you remember what she was singing?"

"Not the words, just the melody. I've never heard it again before or since, but it..." Riki stopped just shy of telling Iason that it often haunted his dreams. Why was he getting so personal? He never talked about that one, precious memory, not even to Guy. "Anyway, it's in the past and doesn't matter now."

Iason wondered if it might be possible to find Riki's mother. Would that be something his pet would like? He never gave much thought to Riki's humble beginnings, beyond a cursive investigation once he'd taken him and made him a pet. For Iason there was only Jupiter, who was both mother and father, but it was not the same as a human parent. He knew the number of orphans ran high in places like Midas and Ceres, but wouldn't it be interesting to know Riki's true origin?

"Yes, well..." He sat back and indicated Riki's bowl. He was rather enjoying this. "Your turn."

"I don't want to do this anymore."

"Why not? It seems the only way for us to have a conversation."

"You never cared about that before. All you want to do is fuck me."

Again Iason was reminded of Katze's earlier words and he wondered if Riki truly felt that way. "If that were true you would be naked by now."

Riki scoffed. "How? You can't walk and I'm not wearing the pet ri..."

He was startled when Iason suddenly reached forward with his long arms, gripped Riki by the collar and literally hauled him across the table and into his lap. "W...what the fuck!" He knew Iason was strong, but how could he be this strong without even his legs for support?

Iason gripped Riki's wrists with one hand. "Do not *think* for a single moment that I cannot take you, should I wish it, Riki. I am far from helpless."

Riki glanced at the scattered dishes on the floor, glared at Iason and started to struggle. "You bastard! I knew you would try something like this! I fucking knew you lied about my being free!"

"No, Riki, I did not lie, I am merely demonstrating that should I truly wish to make you mine again I could." Iason tried to curb his rising arousal as

Riki continued to squirm in his lap. He caught Riki's head and pulled it towards his own so their foreheads touched. "*Stop* it, Riki."

Riki wasn't sure if it was because he knew he couldn't escape, or it was just the residual of his training that always responded to that particular tone of Iason's, but he stilled. "Fine. Do what you fucking want. I'll never be free of you."

"You are free." Iason closed his eyes, breathed in Riki's scent, curled his free arm around his pet to revel in his hardness and warmth. "I can take you by force, Riki, but I will not." He curled his fingers through Riki's hair and tugged so the mongrel was forced to look at him. "Do you understand that I am *trying* to give you a choice? Is that not what you asked for?"

Riki stared at him, a wealth of conflicting emotions swirling inside of him. "I..." What did that mean? Was he free or not? "What...choice?"

"To stay with me."

"I can't!" The hand in his hair tightened.

"That is a reflex answer, Riki. I want a decision, a real one."

"I...Told you I would stay until you were better..."

"And then?"

"I..." Riki didn't know what he would do then, he couldn't decide. He was just trying to get through it one day at a time. And yet, despite this fact, his answer was geared for pain, toward the man that was always hurting him. "Then, I leave."

"So, that is your choice? You are firm on it?"

"Yes." No! No he wasn't firm on it at all! Why were they even talking about this? Why wasn't Iason touching him, taking his clothes off? Wasn't he going to fuck him?

Iason looked so deeply into his eyes that Riki was sure the Blondie was scanning his brain and reading his thoughts. Then suddenly, he was free and the surprise of the moment caused him to slip off of Iason's lap and land on the floor.

"Leave me."

Riki scrambled up and bolted out of the room.

Chapter 19

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki has returned to sleeping alone and is plagued by nightmares still, so Iason comes to the rescue

It was dark, so dark and quiet. Why was it so cold? Riki shivered and tried to pull his jacket closer around himself as he focused on putting one foot in front of the other on the desolate highway. He had to keep going, he had to get away and claim his freedom; if he could just keep walking.

He glanced back, as he had every few minutes since he had started the journey, expecting to see someone coming up behind him to drag him back. There was no one behind him, and no one ahead, but he couldn't get rid of this horrible paranoia; this awful feeling of dread.

When he finally spotted the outline of a city in the distance, instead of relief he felt only trepidation. Was that...Ceres? Yes, it had to be, that's where he had been going right? He was always trying to get back to Ceres, but...why? What was there for him anymore? His gang was disbanded, Guy...Where was Guy? Something had happened but he couldn't remember what it was.

Well, there was no other choice was there? He was free now, and freedom meant that he was no longer under Iason Mink's thumb. Free from the monster's control, from the constant degradation and humiliation.

He shivered again, and then couldn't seem to stop. What he wouldn't give for a warm bath right about now; maybe even some of that nice selling stuff that Cal...He paused at the thought, shook it away and quickened his pace. He was never cold in Tanagura, unless he stayed too long on the balcony, and then Iason would come out and wrap his arms around him and he would be immediately warm again. He didn't understand how an android could always generate so much heat

"Stop it!" he growled at himself, unnerved when his voice echoed in the emptiness around him. Iason was part of his past. He was free now, he had

made his choice and he would stand by it.

The city ahead became more defined and his tired legs gained renewed strength. Yes! Even in Ceres he could get out of this cold, maybe get something to eat. He could start his life over again and forget all about Iason Mink and...

Riki.

He stumbled at the sound of his name, looked around, but he was alone. He straightened and continued on. A cold wind rushed past him and with it the distinct smell of burning.

Riki.

Shivering he looked back over his shoulder and saw the glow on the horizon. What...what was that? The sun didn't come up on that side, so what was it? The sky overhead grew brighter and there was a terrible rumble that carried across the air.

Riki.

"Iason!" he cried as his feet started moving of their own volition towards the glow. "Iason!"

You are my pet.

Riki lurched to a halt and turned to look back at the city, which now seemed farther away than it had. The scent of fire filled his nostrils, the glow before him grew stronger and the crackle of flames echoed.

No! He was free! His feet started to move backwards. He wouldn't go back. He owed Iason Mink nothing. He was free!

You belong to me.

Damn it! Damn it! Riki turned around and started to run again, this time towards Ceres. He had to get away. He belonged to no one, no one! A figure appeared before him on the road.

“Riki!”

“Guy! Guy!” Riki started to run faster, and then suddenly stopped as he saw the laser scalpel in his friend’s hand.

Don’t be his, Riki! You don’t have to be mine, but don’t be his!

Riki fell backwards, scraping his hands as they slapped hard against the pavement. “No!”

Guy held out his hand. “Riki! Come to me! I won’t let him take you!”

Riki looked back, saw the burning ruins of Dana Burn and Iason Mink sitting amongst the flames, his legs severed, his expression one of peaceful acceptance.

Go, Riki. Leave me.

Riki looked from Guy to Iason and back again. Freedom or death, but with Guy would he ever really be free? Guy was as obsessed with him as Iason was. Why? Why did they care so much about him? He didn’t understand it.

You must chose, Riki.

“Riki!” Guy cried. “Let me love you! You know we can be happy, like we were before!”

Riki stared at his former pairing partner, the only true friend he had ever had, the boy he had rescued from being raped so many years ago. He was the only family Riki had ever known and God how he loved him.

He glanced again toward Iason, a man who had only caused him grief and torment, and yet...and yet Iason had showed his body pleasure that he had never known before, not even with Guy. With Iason he never had to worry about where his next meal was coming from or if his meager apartment generator would give out and he would freeze to death over the harsh winters of Ceres. He never had to worry about anything because Iason controlled it all.

Turning, he started to run.

“Riki!” Guy screamed at him.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry!” Riki sobbed as he ran towards the flames, towards Iason.

Guy suddenly appeared before him. “He can’t have you!”

Riki felt the blade stab through him, unable to stop his forward momentum even for an instant. He cried out as Guy stood over him, the blade dripping with his blood.

“You’re mine, not his! Not his! Not his!”

The blade swooped down again and Riki screamed.

Iason watched Riki on the monitor, noticed the change in his sleep pattern and the young man’s sudden uneven breathing. He was dreaming again. Ever since their dinner a few days ago, Riki had stubbornly gone back to sleeping in his own room; back to the nightmares.

He was at his wits end knowing what to do with his pet. Riki was determined to leave and nothing he said would change that. Letting Riki go was not an option, and yet neither was forcing him to stay. There seemed no way through Riki’s anger and resentment and it was beyond frustrating.

Becoming kinder, gentler and more tolerant seemed to have no affect on Riki’s determination to be free. Using force, or threats only pushed his pet further away from him. Even his attempt to use Riki’s obvious affection for Cal as leverage had failed. What more could he possibly do? He had never faced such a difficult problem.

Katze had mentioned verbalizing his feelings to Riki, but had he not already done that? He reminded Riki often who he belonged to and that he would never let him go. Compliments rolled off or Riki’s back like rain water and never seemed to penetrate his tough exterior. Was that because he refused to believe them, or because he had such little confidence?

Iason sighed. Humans were usually so predictable, so what was it about this one slum mongrel that was so complicated? Riki's body he understood, he knew the boy's body better than Riki himself. Riki's mind was also easily understood, Iason could predict his pet's reactions to almost any given scenario, but Riki's heart, the core of a human's emotions, was something that mystified Iason. How could he understand that which he did not have, and how could he win a prize that was so rigidly guarded?

Riki's breathing accelerated and Iason focused on the monitor again, Riki started to thrash about in his sleep. This nightmare seemed unusually violent, and when Riki started to scream, Iason turned the monitor off.

Riki was burning! Guy had left him bleeding on the highway as the flames from Dana Burn crawled towards him like a glowing red snake. He could no longer see Iason, or Guy, or anything, all he could see was fire. All he could smell was his own flesh burning.

"Help me!" He screamed. "Oh God! Oh God! *Iason!*"

As if by magic a damp cloak surrounded him, extinguishing the flames instantly. He started to shiver and sob, and the cloak wrapped more securely around him. It was cool, so cool, and comforting. He sighed and clung to the wrapping, desperate to keep it with him, to always keep it near. The feeling of coolness faded into a gentle warmth and Riki allowed his eyes to close.

When Riki's eyes opened again the soft glow of a rising sun filtered through his terrace doors. A dream. It had been another nightmare. He realized he was wrapped in something warm and firm, and when he lifted his gaze he saw the incredible blue eyes of Iason staring down at him.

"W...what?" Trying to shake off the remnants of his dream, Riki tried to sit up, but Iason's hold on him tightened. "Let go."

"I won't," Iason whispered against Riki's hair. "I'll never let you go."

He had used his hover chair to reach Riki's room, found Cal already there and had used the boy to help get him onto the bed and situated against the

headboard, so he could pull his screaming, sobbing pet into his arms.

The sounds had awakened something primal in him, something he never knew existed. He had heard Riki scream before, often he had been the cause of it and the boy's tears rarely affected him, but this was different. The utter terror and agony that he had witnessed had caused such fear inside of him; that same fear he had experienced when he watched Guy hold up the Riki's pet ring.

"S...stop," Riki began and found he was trembling again, was it the after affects of his dream, or because he was in Iason's arms?

"Let me, Riki," Iason murmured as he ran a soothing hand over Riki's back. "Let me offer you some of comfort you so often give me."

Riki was startled by Iason's words, but was too shaken and tired to continue to struggle. He relaxed back against Iason's chest. How did he give Iason comfort? Was the Blondie talking about sex?

Iason said no more, just held him and gently rocked him, and while any other time Riki would have protested being treated like a child, this time he welcomed it.

"Would you like some water, Riki?"

Riki's eyes focused on Cal standing at the end of the bed. "No." When he spotted Katze in the doorway he realized that he had awakened the whole house. Shit. "S...sorry. I'm sorry."

"It's all right, Riki. Are you sure there is nothing I can get you?"

"Bring some brandy, Cal," Iason advised and noticed that Riki didn't argue.

"Right away." Cal hurried out and closed the door, taking Katze with him.

"Do you wish to talk about it?"

Riki shook his head and found his hand drifting towards the mane of gold that spilled over Iason's shoulder and tickled his cheek. "No." He let

himself coil a silken strand around his finger. It couldn't be real hair, he thought; no one's hair was this soft.

“It is supposed to help if you discuss it.” Iason almost smiled as Riki rubbed his hair between his thumb and forefinger and wondered if his pet was even aware the habit. “But I will not force you.”

He should let go of Iason, he should push away but he could still see his dream streaming before his waking eyes like an ancient film sheet. “Same...same as always only...only...”

Only this time he hadn't turned away from Guy fast enough and his friend had caught him. He had been so focused on getting away from Iason that in the end he died alone. A sob rose in his throat again and his fingers gripped Iason's shirt. He could still feel the phantom pain of the laser scalpel against his genitals, even though he had been unconscious when it had happened. Somehow the memory had penetrated the injection that Guy had given him.

“Were you back at Dana Burn?”

“No. It was there, I could see it, but I...I wasn't there. I was...running from it.” Running from Iason, from captivity and humiliation and yet...in the end, he had gone back, or tried to. “Why...why did you save Guy?” he asked suddenly.

“Because you begged me to.”

“I've begged before and that never swayed you.” He felt the slight vibration of Iason's chuckle.

“Am I really such an unimaginable bastard?”

“Yes.”

Another chuckle, and Iason's hand moved to caress Riki's hair. “There is a difference to making you plead for release and pleading for something you truly want, and I always let you come eventually.” He caught Riki's chin,

lifted it so the young man would meet his gaze. "I listen when it is important, Riki."

Riki scoffed and tried not to lose himself in those dark, ocean depths. "Like when?"

He pressed his lips to Riki's forehead and continued his caress. "When Darryl tried to help you escape Eos, I knew it was what you needed and so I set you free."

"Then forced me to come back a year later."

"I never said it was a permanent thing, and you did have a year to do whatever you wished, Riki. No other pet would ever receive such a favor."

"How was that seeing to *my* needs?"

Iason ignored the question. "After you were attacked in the salon and you asked me to get you out of Tanagura, I let you go to work with Katze."

That was true, and it was something that Riki had totally not expected to have happen. "As long as I was on a leash."

"Yes, and yet my good deed ended up with you being kidnapped and both of us nearly killed." Iason pinched Riki's ear, smiled at the small yelp. "You can understand why I don't always want to give you everything you ask for; it just leads to more trouble."

Riki's lips twitched, but he pressed them firmly together. He couldn't let his guard down, if he did he'd be right back where he started, and yet he was too exhausted to fight with Iason anymore.

He sighed. "I'm so tired of this shit."

"Then come back into my bed, Riki. It will benefit us both if you do."

"No...maybe..." God! He was in no shape to make decisions. He carefully pulled away as Cal knocked and entered with a small glass of brandy.

"Thank you, Cal. You can go back to bed now."

Cal nodded and left, closing the door once more, as Iason pressed the glass to Riki's lips. Riki accepted the liquid, because his hands were still shaking.

"A little more, finish it down."

Riki complied, glad it was only half-way full because he never had developed a taste for brandy. "Uuuggg." He wiped his mouth in distaste, but could feel the burning sensation of the alcohol sliding down his throat and dropping into his upset stomach; almost immediately easing his nerves. "How do you drink that shit all the time?"

"I don't." Iason set the empty glass on the night stand. "I only have it on occasion." He caught Riki's chin, lifted and captured his mouth in a sweet, teasing kiss. His tongue slid in only a little to tangle with Riki's and taste the brandy that still lingered upon it. "It tastes better from you than it does from the bottle."

Riki offered a mild shove, he had allowed the kiss because Iason had helped wake him from his nightmare, but he wasn't about to have sex with him. "I'm okay, you can go now."

"I'd prefer to stay."

Riki shrugged, ignoring the relief he felt at not having to sleep alone again. "Whatever." He started to turn away from Iason, then realized that the Blondie might need help moving down further in the bed. "Um...do you want me to...?"

Iason nodded and Riki helped get him situated under the covers. "Thank you, Riki."

"Yeah, well..." He wanted to say thank you for pulling him from the dream, but he just couldn't. "Well...good night. And don't try anything."

Iason smiled. "I wouldn't dream of it."

Chapter 20

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki's choice is made, but can he live with it.

Riki pressed play on the stereo and then moved to stand by the rain-battered patio doors of the living area to watch the ocean waves toss and curl and crash in the surrounding storm. This had become his spot, much as the balcony had been in Eos; his one place where he could think and smoke and just get away from things for awhile.

Iason's therapy was going really well, in fact he fully expected that the Blondie would be back on his feet within the next couple of weeks. That gave him some relief, but it was also a great cause of stress, for he knew once Iason was walking he would have to leave.

I always needed time on my own

I never thought I'd need you there when I cry
And the days feel like years when I'm alone
And the bed where you lie
Is made up on your side

*When you walk away I count the steps that you take
Do you see how much I need you right now?*

After he had woken up in Iason's arms the other night he realized that he needed the Blondie to help dispel his nightmares, so had swallowed his pride and started sleeping in Iason's room again. Iason no longer attempted to touch him, except when they were sleeping in which Iason requested Riki allow himself to be held, so they could both manage both their recollections of past trauma.

Most of Riki's resentment seemed to have dissipated to what could only be described as a dull ache because Iason no longer seemed even mildly

interested in trying to control him, and at least he felt useful here, whereas back in Tanagura he always felt rather worthless, because Iason controlled everything, from what he wore to what they ate to when they had sex. Finally, Riki had some say in the matter and he was surprised at the difference it made just being able to say no and Iason actually respecting that response.

When you're gone

The pieces of my heart are missing you

When you're gone

The face I came to know is missing too

When you're gone

The words I need to hear to always get me through the day

And make it OK

I miss you

He and Katze shared their meals together as Iason seemed content to eat in his room with Cal attending him. Katze did not attempt to draw Riki into a discussion, as Iason always had, and when Riki tried he got simple, one word answers. It made him realize how frustrating it was to have a proper conversation with someone who refused to participate.

Iason had often tried to talk to him during their meals together, but Riki knew so little about Iason's work, and since he did nothing during the day besides wait for Iason to return, there was even less for them to talk about. That made him sullen and resentful, and he supposed, childish as well. Iason never showed his frustration and Riki wondered why.

I've never felt this way before

Everything that I do reminds me of you

And the clothes you left, they lie on the floor

And they smell just like you,

I love the things that you do

*When you walk away I count the steps that you take
Do you see how much I need you right now?*

Iason was teaching Cal how to play a strategy game named Jaku, and the Blondie was decidedly patient and encouraging, gently criticizing the boy's numerous mistakes by showing Cal how to learn from them. Riki realized that Iason probably was pretty tolerant with him too, most of the time, especially their last year together. His punishments were few and far between, and nowhere near as brutal as they once were. Why he had only thought of Iason as a demon or beast he wasn't sure, but now he was starting to see a gentler side of the Blondie and it both intrigued and bewildered him.

Katze sometimes brought back a program or machine that he would let Riki tinker with, to see if it could be improved, or if there was hacking involved, he'd let Riki try his hand. It was nice to have something else to focus his mind on instead of always thinking about Iason and his future. Riki had even accompanied Katze a few times away from the house, which lent credence to Iason's promise that Riki was truly free.

When you're gone
The pieces of my heart are missing you
When you're gone
The face I came to know is missing too
When you're gone
The words I need to hear to always get me through the day
And make it OK
I miss you

In the evenings Iason liked to read and Riki had developed the habit of sitting in the same room, if not right beside him, working on a program Katze had given him or playing a video game. Before he would be expected to sit at his master's feet or stretched across his lap, but Iason made no such demands anymore and it confounded Riki.

It felt weird to just sit together and Riki could never fully relax because he still expected Iason to move closer, order him to sit on his lap, or try to kiss or touch him. Instead, Iason remained on his best behaviour and Riki was angry at himself for feeling disappointed.

It was a relief not to be pawed at or reminded that he was a pet and he belonged to a master, but at the same time his body still craved Iason's touch and he could admit that he was starting to feel lonely. Was Iason no longer interested in him? Had he had truly given up and just didn't want him anymore? This idea resulted in an entirely new set of feelings that confused and frustrated him.

We were made for each other

Out here forever

I know we were, yeah, yeah

All I ever wanted was for you to know

Everything I do, I give my heart and soul

I can hardly breathe, I need to feel you here with me, yeah

He had finally managed to teach Cal to swim and the young furniture had started to enjoy it. They went out every afternoon, when the weather was good, for a quick dip in the water and Riki found himself growing even closer to Cal; started thinking of him more as a little brother than furniture.

When you're gone

The pieces of my heart are missing you

When you're gone

The face I came to know is missing too

When you're gone

The words I need to hear will always get me through the day

And make it OK

I miss you

“So, on a scale of one to ten, how sexually frustrated are you.”

Riki glanced around as Katze entered the room. "Fifteen."

Katze chuckled. "I figured." He leaned against the wall opposite Riki. "I'd offer to help you out, but as ex-furniture I'd be useless in that area."

And image of Daryl going down on him snuck into Riki's memory and he quickly shook it away; but not before he wondered if Katze had ever been requested to do something similar. Did all furniture have to learn such things?

"And you call yourself a friend," he tossed, hoping the humor would dispel the dark thoughts. He sighed, wandered over to the sofa and dropped down. "This is all so fucked up."

"So why don't you put you and Iason out of your misery and do it already?"

"I'm not his pet anymore, Katze."

"So don't do it as his pet."

Riki shook his head, he was on that again was he? Iason could never be considered his lover or pairing partner. It wasn't possible. "I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because it...can't be like that. Iason will only ever see me as a pet, just like he only sees you and Cal as furniture. He can't change what he is."

"He already has changed, Riki, you just refuse to see it." Katze paused. "You know, Iason could have just had me terminated because of a mistake I made as his furniture, but instead he decided to utilize the talents he saw in me."

Riki again thought of Daryl, who had not been on the receiving end of Iason's favor. "But you're still just his furniture, Katze."

"I belong to him, yes. If he wants something done, I do it, but I also have my own life outside of Iason. I have my own place. I make my own money..."

"You make money for Iason."

"Sure, but I get a salary, no other furniture does. Furniture is not permitted to live outside their master's home, but I do. Furniture is not permitted to make their own decisions nor are they highly trusted in the things that Iason trusts me with. I'm as free as I can be, considering I am still furniture."

"But you have to stop everything to report to Iason, to do what Iason wants."

"Yes."

"And you don't see the problem with that?"

"No, because I am more than willing to do anything my master asks me."

"But *why*?"

"I just explained why. He saved my live, Riki. He's given me a life outside of just being furniture and I am forever in his debt because of it." Katze poured them each a glass of Sake, handed one to Riki then settled in the chair opposite. "You don't like to feel indebted to anyone, and I get that, but I am indebted to Iason and I always will be. He is my master, for now and always, and I have accepted that."

"You're out of your mind."

"Why, because I appreciate and understand the risks that Iason took to give me the life that I have?"

"Yes! No matter what you claim he has done for you, you're still on a chain! You're still nothing more than Iason Mink's lapdog!"

"And you're still just his pet," Katze returned without a trace of malice. "Whether he gives you freedom or not, you know that you will always belong to Iason."

"Shut up!" Riki bolted upright, only to have Katze catch his swinging hand by the wrist, so the two were standing close enough they could feel each

others breath.

"You still don't get it. Being Iason's furniture is not the same as being furniture for anyone else, just like being Iason's pet isn't the same. You've seen it for yourself, you've seen the way he protected you from what the other pets have to endure. You've accepted the freedoms he gave you in Apatia, when no other pets would ever receive such freedoms, and you *still* show not one ounce of gratitude."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Riki wrenched himself away and glared at Katze, furious. "I'm supposed to be grateful...to *him*? He kidnapped me when I was fucking fifteen and kept me chained up in a room, naked, for months, while he played with me and beat me and forced chemicals into me. He humiliated me, tortured me, fucking pissed all over my pride for four years and I'm supposed to be grateful for that?"

"Yes," Katze returned simply, released Riki's wrist and took a cautious step back in case the mongrel started swinging again. "Because as his pet you also had his protection, his resources and his attention. You were fed, clothed, given money, and if there was anything you really needed or wanted he would have provided it for you."

"I didn't fucking ask for any of that!"

"And were you so much better off in Ceres, fighting for every scrap, or working for me in an environment where you could be just as easily killed and forgotten?"

"I can take care of myself! I've been doing it all my life and I was just fine before Iason Mink came along!"

"You weren't just fine or you wouldn't have come to me looking for work!" Katze reminded. "You were selling yourself on the fucking street, Riki!"

"That was one time! One fucking time to pay a debt and it cost me my freedom, my choice! I didn't want that! I never wanted that!" But it wasn't just one time and Riki hated his own denial.

Before he had met Guy, trading his body had sometimes been a necessity, hell, even afterwards he had done it once or twice. So had Guy it was part of living in Ceres, part of making a deal or paying a debt, but that didn't make him a whore! The hardest thing was realizing that none of those men, not even Guy, could make him feel one tenth of what Iason made him feel; none of them knew what his body was capable of as much as that damned Blondie Elite.

"Then what *do* you want, Riki? What exactly do you want from Iason that he hasn't given or offered you?"

"To be free!"

To be free of needing Iason's touch. To be free of wanting Iason, free of waiting for that occasional look of approval that sometimes made him so fucking happy he could weep. He wanted to be free of all these conflicting feelings, free to hate the man he couldn't live without.

"You *are* free!" Katze snapped, finally allowing his anger to show. "If that is all you wanted then why are you still here? Take your freedom and run, if that is truly all you want from him. I'll even drive you wherever the hell you want. So go on, leave!"

"Fine!" Overwhelmed by his emotions, pushed to the edge by his own fears and desires, Riki stalked across the room. "I'm out of here!" He threw open the main entrance door, then stopped as if he had hit an invisible barrier. He stared at the sheets of rain falling in front of him and started to tremble.

"Well?" Katze followed. "You're not going to let a little rain stop you, are you?"

"No!" Yes! He didn't give a shit that it was storming, he had been out in worse; he needed to run! And yet, he knew if he stepped outside this door that he'd never come back; he'd never be welcomed back.

What was wrong with him? This door, it suddenly felt like the one in Eos, the door he could never go through until...until Daryl. This door, just like that one, led to freedom, a life away from Iason Mink and constant sex and

the degradation and humiliation. But he'd be caught, just like he had before, wouldn't he? He'd be dragged back again by Iason's goons, right? Iason wasn't really going to let him go, was he?

"Riki?"

He couldn't really mean to just let him go free, not after everything he had done to keep him. Not after blackmailing him to come back to Eos, and giving him an apartment in Apatia. Not after tracking him to Dana Burn and getting injured trying to save him and Guy. He wasn't really going to just let him go, was he? Had the last four years really meant nothing to Iason? Was he really nothing more than a Blondie's pet?

"I...can't."

"Why can't you? You have your freedom. Iason has given his word that he won't come after you, so go!"

"I....I..." Why didn't he run? Why didn't he do just that and get away from Iason and the lives of furniture and pets and every stinking thing that he hated? Was it really just pride that made him want to walk away only if Iason was healed, or was there something more? Was it his conditioning? No, he'd run before...once before...

Katze watched the inner conflict showing on the younger man's face and stepped forward. "Riki, what do *you* want?"

"I..." To be free, his soul cried, but his heart stammered a different answer. His heart betrayed him, tormented him, humiliated him as only one person had ever done before. "Iason! I...I want Iason!" God help him, for wanting to stay with such a man. "I can't do it anymore! I can't be a....p...pet and he...he doesn't want me as....as anything else."

"You don't know..."

Riki spun around to face Katze, his expression bordering on hysteria, his voice several frantic octaves above normal as he tried to push back the panic, the fear and confusion. "I *can't* go back to Eos! I can't stand the

stares and the noise and...and the....suffocating *hate*." He swayed and when Katze caught him, he wearily lowered his head to the taller man's chest and gripped the front of his shirt. He couldn't go back to being treated as a worthless object. "Pets are lower than shit. I can't....I just can't be *that* again."

"Riki."

Both men turned, noticed Iason had entered the room in his hover chair with Cal behind him.

"Shit." Riki shoved away from Katze, horrified to be seen in such a state.

"Riki, look at me. Please."

Biting hard on the inside of his cheek and angrily blinking away the tears that threatened to fall he turned back and watched as Iason slowly, cautiously braced his hands on the arms of his chair and started to rise.

Cal and Katze immediately moved forward to assist and Iason spoke only one word to still them.

"No."

Everyone held their breath as Iason slowly rose, until every wonderful tall and powerful inch of him was standing erect. "I am here, Riki." He took a faltering step, then another. "Come to me."

"Iason!" Before he could comprehend the reason why, Riki had rushed into Iason's arms. "You did it," he murmured around the baseball sized lump in his throat. "I...I knew you could...I knew..."

Riki's warmth enveloped Iason and he shut his eyes tightly. At last Riki had come into his arms willingly and his pet felt so warm and alive. "Yes, Riki. It's all for you, only you." Overcome, Iason lifted his head to look down at the younger man and instinct took over as his mouth descended to hungrily claim Riki's.

Riki was responding before he could stop himself, unsure if it was because he was conditioned to or if it was just the joy of seeing Iason walking again, but a moment later he tore his mouth away and stepped back. "No."

Iason slowly released him. "Why, Riki?" He was better now, they could be together again. He wanted to take Riki to bed and make love to him for the next two weeks!

"I can't. I'm not...your pet, remember?"

"I do not ask as your master!" Iason snapped and hated the fact that he immediately felt his strength waning and had to reach for Riki's shoulders to steady himself. "I ask because we both want it, we both need it."

"I don't!"

"Riki, why must you always fight me? Is it just to hurt me?"

Katze closed the front door shut out the sound of the rain from outside.

"It's not...I didn't...Fuck!" Riki paled and stumbled back further, then put further distance between them by walking over and dropping onto the sofa. "I...I don't...know."

Katze helped Iason cross the room so he could settle beside Riki, then tapped Cal on the shoulder and they left the pair alone.

"I...I'm...glad you...you're better," Riki muttered, even as he wiped at the tears streaming down his cheeks. Why the fuck was he crying? "I...I knew you could be...would be. I'm....glad, but I...I can't..."

"What can I do, Riki?" Iason asked quietly. "Please, now is the time for truth between us. Is what you told Katze true?"

Riki mumbled something incoherently, then nodded.

"Then...what is it you require of me to make you happy?"

"I...I don't know! I don't want to be your *pet*."

"If we are to be together you must be."

Riki shook his head and lowered his head into his hands.

"Tell me, Riki. Tell me what you would like to do."

Riki was silent.

"Do you want to be with me?"

"Yes!" It hurt! Dear God, it hurt so very much to admit that, he felt like his chest was about to explode from the inside out.

Riki's reluctant confession was Iason's undoing and all the control he'd been hiding behind the last two weeks finally snapped. He caught Riki's hair in his grasp, yanked the boy's head up and plundered his mouth. Riki's hands splayed against Iason's chest, but not, he noticed, to push him away.

He pushed Riki back against the cushions and kissed his way down Riki's body before freeing the mongrel's throbbing erection and engulfing him with his mouth.

Riki's hips arched towards Iason's mouth automatically. He knew he should stop this, knew it would lead to nothing, but God, it felt so good! It felt so fucking incredible! Instead of pulling away his hands dove into Iason's thick, wonderful hair. He wanted this, needed this and he would take it, accept it because it was Iason.

He needed comfort, he needed Iason's touch. Just for awhile longer, just until he could get his bearings again, or maybe so he couldn't. Maybe he needed to just stop thinking and feeling and worrying over everything. Iason could make him forget everything but sex, everything but the Blondie's touch and right now that was what he needed.

He tugged on Iason's hair until the Blondie lifted his head to look at him.
"Do it to me."

"Riki..."

"Just...do it, like before. So I can't think or...or feel or...Please? Just...do that, please?"

The tears had started again and he ruthlessly pushed them back, then realized that Iason probably couldn't manage that kind of acrobatics just yet, so he sat up, freed his master and straddled him. He needed to forget, just for a little while, forget the clusterfuck that was his life.

"Wait..." Iason moaned as the mongrel slowly lowered and impaled himself. "Riki!"

"Just this," Riki moaned, his thighs already trembling with pain and need. It hurt! It hurt because it had been so long and there was almost no preparation, but he didn't care. "Don't talk, just...just give me this."

Iason wrapped his arms around Riki and held him tight for a long moment, then Riki started to move. He slid one hand between them to stroke Riki as his mouth savaged the mongrel's nipples.

"Ahhhh!" Yes! Like that, just like that! A flash of him telling Guy that his nipples were his good spots lighted in his memory then was blasted away by the feel of Iason's teeth. "Uuuhhh! F...Fuck!" This was what was missing, this was what he had needed, God help him!

"What do you want, Riki?"

"H...harder...do me...harder."

Iason gripped Riki's waist and easily controlled the mongrel's rise and fall over his cock, lifting him up then letting gravity slam him back down. Each time Iason went deeper and deeper into Riki as the mongrel shamelessly shuddered, moaned and nearly wept with joy.

"You feel so good ..." Iason had to clamp down on calling Riki his pet, aware it would sever the fragile peace they had managed. "I have missed you, Riki."

"Yes!" Riki whimpered as the Blondie seemed to hit his prostrate every single time. "Ahhhh...Iason...mmmmnnnhhh....F...Fuck...more...please!"

Riki's hands fisted the shirt covering Iason's biceps and threw his head back in ecstasy as Iason continued to pound into him. Amazing, so amazing, even better than he could even remember.

"I...want to...come." Even now, after everything, Riki still felt he had to ask for permission.

"Then come, Riki."

That was all it took and Riki cried out at a long, lingering release that seemed to go on for ages. He slumped forward and wrapped his arms around Iason's neck.

Iason was stunned by the embrace, it was something Riki had never done before, and it pushed him over the edge. He came with Riki's name on his lips.

Riki panted against Iason and as his passion started to ebb, his body slowly started to cool, he suddenly started to sob.

"Riki." Iason gathered his lover closer to him, brushed his hand over his hair. "What is it?"

"I want to hate you," he murmured. "I *wish* I could hate you."

"But you don't."

"No. No." Riki didn't hate Iason, he hated what Iason had done to him, what he had made him become, but he didn't hate Iason. "You hurt me. All...all you do is...hurt me and...try to...control me."

Iason felt a sharp stab in his heart. Was that true? Yes, he supposed it was, in Riki's mind anyway. Riki was told when to eat, when to sleep, when to have sex. While it seemed normal for a pet to accept this, he finally understood, at least partially, why Riki could not.

"I'll try not to anymore," he whispered, softly. "If you'll stay with me, I will do my very best not to hurt you anymore, Riki."

Riki's arms dropped weakly to his side as he slid off of Iason's lap and adjusted his clothing, then, exhausted, curled on his side and dropped his face into the sofa cushions, angrily flicking away his tears.

Iason restored his slacks and tenderly pulled Riki's curled legs back across his lap. "Will you give me a chance?" he asked. "Will you at least allow me to try and be what you...what you need me to be?"

"You can't be," came Riki's muffled response. "You don't know how."

"How do you know? Even I do not know that. I am evolving even now, I can change, all of us can change, Riki." When Riki didn't reply, Iason continued. "Would you ask me to be more like your old lover, Guy?"

"No!" Riki sat up suddenly and glared at Iason, fiercely. "I don't want you to be like Guy, you can't be that way so don't even fucking try!"

"Then...tell me what to do, Riki. What is it that I can do to make you stay?"

Riki slumped back on his side again. His body already ached to be joined with Iason's again but his mind, his heart was in turmoil. "Just..."

This was all so fucked up! He didn't know what to tell Iason, what could be done to make him stay. He didn't want to leave but he couldn't stay, he couldn't. What kind of man would that make him to choose to stay with the person who had done such horrible things to him?

"I want to be with you, Riki, however I can only keep you with me as a pet." Iason rubbed Riki's legs, soothingly. "Your life wasn't that difficult before was it? You could stay in Apatia if you like and work for Katze and...."

"And still be chained and told what I can and can't do, where I can and can't go."

Iason sighed. "Then what would you suggest? Shall we both move to Midas and open up a shop together? Is that more realistic for you?"

Riki shook his head, turned on his back and stretched his legs all the way across Iason as he stared up at the ceiling. "Why....why can't we just stay here?"

"Stay here?"

"Yeah. You, me, Cal, we can just stay here and forget about Tanagura and Midas and the other Blondies and just...be here. It's nice here, we have the ocean and...and it's..."

He felt free here; away from the cities and the other elites and pets and all those that looked down on him. He really didn't give a shit about what anyone thought, but if Iason was so worried about the rules and appearances why couldn't he just step away from that life?

"I am not sure that would be a viable solution, Riki. Now that I am nearly recovered my resurrection from the dead will be announced shortly and I will be expected to return to Tanagura, to Eos. I cannot do my job from here, and this is much further away than Apatia, so if you chose to stay here I would see you even less than before."

"Why do you have to go back at all?"

"Riki." Iason sighed and put his arm around his pet, pulling the younger man against him. "Life does not stop, for either of us. I wish with all my being that we could just stay here forever, but we cannot."

"I *won't* go back to Eos, Iason!" Riki sat up, suddenly. "Don't you get it? I can't!"

Iason pulled Riki into his lap and held him tight. "I understand. You were miserable there, I realize that now." he assured quietly as he soothed Riki with his hands. "We will figure something out, I promise we will. As long as you stay with me, I will do whatever I can to make you happy, Riki."

"As your pet."

Iason sighed. "Yes, as my pet." He captured Riki's mouth in a possessive kiss. "But not as a pet. Do you understand the difference?"

Riki thought about what Katze had said, how being Iason's furniture was different than being furniture for anyone else, and how being his pet was also better. Slowly, he nodded and then rose. He retrieved Iason's hover chair from the hallway and pushed it toward the Blondie.

"Let's go upstairs."

"Oh?" Iason's eyes narrowed, amused. "And what will we be doing upstairs?"

"Shut up and get in the chair."

Chapter 21

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki comes to terms with his feeling, but is it too late for a happy ending?

Notes for the Chapter:

I'll be away for a little while so will be unable to update for a couple of weeks. I'm updating now so you hopefully don't all go through withdrawals or something, haha. Anyway, hope you enjoy, I know it's a little choppy, but I wanted to get it up for you. If you enjoy, please, please review. Thanks!

Riki couldn't move. He lay on his stomach, the satin sheets that twisted around his torso and legs, stained with their sweat and body fluids as he allowed his eyes to slowly open. He was alone in the bed, sore, so incredibly sore and tired and ashamed that he had asked for this.

Iason hadn't been brutal, but he had been relentless, because that was what Riki had asked for, had needed. Riki had no time to think or feel, just as he had requested, but now, in the aftermath he began to wonder what in the hell was wrong with him? How could he want this, ask for this, with Iason Mink?

After Riki's final submission, Iason seemed intent to make up for all the time he had been unable to touch his pet and it had taken hours for the master to be satisfied. He didn't dare to think how much worse it would have been if Iason was not still been somewhat hampered by his condition.

Slowly his previous worries began to seep back in, the fear, the indecision, the shame and the longing. What was he supposed to do? Iason said he could be free but was asking...*asking* him to stay and be his pet. Iason was giving him a choice, but Riki was confused about his feelings for Iason, and

had even let his guard down by giving into the needs of his body. Appalled with his own behavior, stunned that he could not bring himself to leave and mortified that he wanted to stay with a man who did nothing but hurt him, he was at a loss of what to do next.

"Master Riki?"

"Don't call me master, Cal."

Cal moved into Riki's line of sight and crouched by the bed. "Shall I run you a bath?"

"No."

"Would you like something to eat?"

"No."

"A cigarette?"

"No."

Cal's eyes widened. "Not even a cigarette?"

The wonder in his voice caused Riki to almost smile. "I'll go for a swim in awhile." Just as soon as he could move again.

"I...I don't think that is wise, sir. The storm is over, but the water still looks very angry."

"Looks angry, does it?"

"Yes, very."

Slowly Riki sat up, swung his legs over the side and waited for his body to stop twitching from discomfort. "That makes two of us." He waited a moment, his head spinning a bit, then he rose and walked, unsteadily to the set of dresser drawers. He was no longer embarrassed about Cal seeing him naked and hadn't been for some time. "Do you want to come with me?"

"No, no I...I really think it is better to stay inside...unless you'd like me to go with you in which case of course I will."

"It's fine. I won't stay out long," Riki promised as he slid into a pair of bathing trunks. "I just need to clear my head."

"P...perhaps...um...perhaps when Katze returns you can both go and..."

"Where's Katze?"

"He...Master Iason sent him on a quick errand."

"I see." Riki put his hand on Cal's shoulder as he grabbed a towel from the cupboard. "I'll be fine, Cal."

Riki rose and opened the door of his terrace; since his room was closer that was where they had ended up. It was still raining, but the air would help clear his mind at least, a mind that was heavy with what had happened in the living room, and the implications of his own confession.

His body was still throbbing from Iason's touch and he hated that he wanted more of it.

Katze was right, perhaps they had both just needed to stop denying themselves. Maybe, maybe if he stopped that, if he gave into the need it would clear up his mind and he would be able to think straight. Maybe if he and Iason got it out of their system he could make a choice, but then, would Iason ever be truly out of his system?

It was true what Iason had said, his return had only partially been because of Iason's threats. He's wasted an entire year in Ceres because he couldn't deal with what had happened to him; couldn't stop thinking of Iason Mink. He'd lost the chance to reconnect with Guy and his gang, threw away the opportunity to rebuild his reputation or try to make something more with his life.

Instead, he wallowed in self-pity, shame and fear for over a year, and all that had accomplished was to lead him right back to Iason. If he was honest

with himself, it was a relief when Iason forced him to return, because then he didn't have to think so much, didn't have to make such difficult decisions.

That revelation hit him like a brick to the stomach and he physically staggered. Everything he ever fought against Iason for was based on the fact that he had no control over his life, and yet here he was, admitting that, at least in that moment, he had been relieved to give up his control to Iason again.

With a low growl that was close to becoming a scream he stepped off the balcony and started to run down the path to the beach. He dropped his towel without stopping as his feet hit the water and moments later he dove head first into an oncoming wave. Cal had been correct, the tide was incredibly strong, but it was also exactly what Riki needed as he pushed through the water with long, powerful strides. He needed something to fight against, something he could actually win against.

It was quite awhile before he came out, and when he did, his exhausted body collapsed on the sand. He lay there, unmoving, as he stared up at the stars. Why couldn't they stay here? This was the nicest place he had ever been to, it was quiet and peaceful, there was no one pointing fingers and treating him like shit. No Elites wandering in and out of space, no glaring lights and background traffic noises. This place was heaven for someone like him. He probably would get bored after awhile, but he hadn't yet and that said something.

He wasn't going to leave Iason, he knew that now. Whatever the Blondie had done to him over the years, his conditioning was complete and leaving was no longer an option. Did Iason know that when he had offered him his freedom? Probably, Iason knew everything; he hated that.

But, he couldn't go back to Tanagura, and Iason had to return there, so where did that leave them? Apatia and Katze? He wasn't averse to it, but as Katze had mentioned earlier, the underworld was a dark place and Riki was tired of constant darkness. He smirked as he recalled Iason's comment about opening a shop in Midas and an idea occurred to him. That actually

wasn't a bad idea, really. A shop...The idea continued to change and develop in his head and he slowly started to smile.

A shadowed face suddenly blocked out his view of the moon, and as he focused he saw a hand coming down; then once again he was back in darkness.

"Iason!" Katze ran in suddenly. "Riki's gone!"

Iason's hand curled into a fist, before slowly straightening again. So, his pet had decided to run after all? "I see."

"No, you don't." Katze moved forward and handed Iason the data pad he'd retrieved from the beach after Cal had come to him, worried when Riki had not returned. "Someone took him."

Iason's moment of grief turned to fear as he grabbed the pad and pressed his thumb to it. He listened to the message, his expression giving nothing away. When he spoke there was white hot fury in his voice.

"I underestimated his desire for control."

"What do we do?" What could they do? Iason still wasn't even officially listed as being alive yet and now they had to deal with this. Katze ran a hand through his hair. "Should I try and contact Jupiter?"

"No." Iason's refusal was very quiet. "I will deal with this on my own."

"But how..." Katze asked, flabbergasted. Iason still could not walk properly and there was only the three of them. "My network can probably find where they've taken him, but it will take time, and we don't have..."

Iason handed the memo pad to Cal, who he noticed was visibly shaking. He took a moment to smooth his hand over the boy's head. "Don't fret, I will fix this. Go to my rooms and bring me down the data portal."

Cal nodded and hurried out of the room.

"Katze, put your contacts to work and find them!"

"What are you....?"

"Obviously they've had eyes on us for some time and my current incapacity to walk has been taken as a sign of weakness, when it could not be further from the truth." He pulled off his white glove, then pressed the thumbnail of his left hand; a moment later it began to blink blue.

"What is that?"

"A call for reinforcements."

Katze's eyes widened.

Riki woke to darkness, cold and limited movement. He pulled at his arms and felt the dreadfully familiar sound of clinking chains. No! No, not this, not again! Where was he, what the hell had happened? He remembered swimming and laying on the beach and then...nothing else.

Iason! Where was Iason, and Katze, and Cal? Where was he? Why was he bound again? Had Iason finally lost his patience with him and decided to start his training over again? No. No, he didn't think Iason would do that.

"Hey! Hey you motherfuckers! Let me go, do you hear me? You let me the fuck go!"

A door opened somewhere in the room and a small shaft of light shifted across the floor. A moment later the room was laminated by a soft glow and Riki was relieved to find that this time he wasn't completely naked; he could tell that at least he still had his swim trunks on. The glow dimmed significantly and then again to only shadows.

"Riki?"

Riki stiffened at the familiar voice and even though he still could not see, who knew immediately who it belonged to. "G...Guy?" Oh God! Oh God, this was bad. If Guy had him again this was so bad! Was his old paring partner going to castrate him again? "W...where...?"

Suddenly an arm slid around him and a heavy, familiar weight pressed him down. He could not embrace Guy, as he was still chained, but nor did he want to. In fact being held by this man that had once been his friend sickened him.

"Oh, Riki. I knew you were still alive! I just knew that they couldn't keep you down forever."

"Guy....you...why am I chained? Why...?"

"It's for your protection, Riki. I told them you wouldn't run, not with me here, but they seem to think otherwise." Guy's mouth was on his a moment later and Riki was too stunned to even respond. "When I saw you with Katze last month I couldn't believe it! I thought you were another hallucination."

"A...another?"

"I see you everywhere Riki, all the time," Guy said calmly as he lifted his head and let Riki see the shadowed contours of his face. "Penance, I thought, for what I did, but now I know it was something else. Now I know it was you trying to tell me you were still alive!" Guy's hand moved down over his chest, caressed his nipples. "I remember what you said, I'll do everything like he does for you, so you won't need him, Riki."

Riki gasped as Guy's mouth fastened over his nipple, but not in pleasure, in shock and fear. This couldn't be happening, not again. He had to reason with Guy, it was his fault that Guy had become so obsessed; his and Iason's.

"Guy..." He bit his lip and yanked in vain at the chains binding his hands. "Guy, stop..."

"I'll do whatever you want me too, Riki, anything you want me too."

"No, Guy...I don't..." He flinched when Guy's hand ran across his cock and all thoughts of desire were instantly replaced with inconceivable fear. "Don't fucking touch me!"

Startled, Guy pulled his hand away. "I'm...sorry, Riki. I shouldn't have done what I did before. I never meant to hurt you..."

"But you did, Guy. You did hurt me and you're doing the same thing now." Riki screamed in frustration, pulling his body taught against his bindings. "Let me go!"

"I...can't, Riki." Guy reached to caress Riki's face and Riki turned away.

"Don't touch me!"

Guy seemed to accept Riki's anger. "You have every right to hate me, Riki, it's fine if you do, but I will save you."

"I don't need to be saved!"

"I'll do it right this time, Riki. This time Iason won't escape and you'll be free of him forever."

Guy was mad. His friend had completely lost it. "G...Guy. You gotta let me go..."

"No! No, you don't. You never have to go back again, Riki. You'll be free, don't you see and..."

"I have to go back, Guy. "

"You...you're confused, Riki. You don't know what you're saying..."

"I do know what I'm saying!" And for the first time in years, Riki spoke the honest truth. A feeling of clarity settled over him. "He'll find me, Guy. He'll never stop looking and this time..." This time he wouldn't be able to stop Iason from killing his former pairing partner. "You'll get hurt again."

Guy scoffed, spoke a word and the lights glowed brighter so that Riki could see the loose sleeve of his shirt. "Hurt? You think he can hurt me worse than this, Riki? He took my arm! What else can he do?"

"He can do much worse, Guy, so much worse." Riki had experienced Iason's temper, and realized that even with the past beatings they had barely scratched the surface. "You don't understand. I'm his pet, I belong to him and he does not forgive anyone who touches what belongs to him."

"You are not his pet! You are a free man! You're my friend, Riki!"

"I...I am your friend, Guy, but I belong to Iason now..."

"Stop it!" Guy snarled and a crazed look slid into his eyes. "You are Riki the Dark. You bow to no one, no one!"

"Guy..."

"He won't be able to find you until we want him to, Riki. No one else knows about you, but us so you're safe now."

"Who...who the hell is us, Guy?" Dread crawled up Riki's stomach. Please God don't tell him that Guy got the other members of Bison involved in this madness. "What did you do? Who...who did you make a deal with?"

"His name is Orphe, he's a Blondie, but he's fine. He agrees that you don't belong to Iason, so as soon as they get him they're gonna let you go, and then you'll be free of him, Riki."

Riki felt tears sting his eyes. Another trap, just like Dana Burn. "Guy...I...Look, you can't trust Orphe...you can't trust any of them."

"You trusted Iason." The bitterness in Guy's tone was obvious. "You chose to stay with him!"

"Iason is different!" And even as he said the words Riki realized the truth of them. Finally, all the things that Katze had been trying to tell him hit home. Iason *was* different from the other Elites and Riki knew that he could trust him. "For fuck's sake, cut me loose!"

"I can't do that, Riki, I'm sorry."

Riki recalculated. "Guy, let me go, come on. Let's both get out of here right now and..."

"He'll just hunt you down and bring you back again, Riki; like you said he will never let you go. We have to deal with Iason Mink once and for all, and then you'll be free. It's okay, Orphe said he'll even give us some money to live on once this is done and..."

"And you believe him?" Riki groaned and yanked at his chains again. "Guy! They told Kirie the same thing and then they made him a fucking mindless sex doll."

"Iason Mink did that, remember. That is why you can't trust him!"

Riki really didn't care what had been done to Kirie, or if Iason was behind it, he was just trying to prove to Guy that they couldn't trust Blondies. "Guy, I...we've got a second chance again. Do you want this to end up like before? Do you...do you want me to die again?"

"It won't! I've got it worked out better this time and we have support. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, Riki. It will work this time, and then we will be free of Iason Mink forever!"

"I don't want to be free of him!" Riki cried, frustrated, angry and frightened now beyond measure. Guy had completely lost his mind and now the truth in his words rung through the room, hung there in the silent aftermath.

"You don't know what you're saying, Riki! He's brainwashed you, but it's okay. We just need to get you away from him and..."

Suddenly, all of Riki's doubts faded away and he became clear and focused. "I love him, Guy."

"No!"

"Yes! I...I *love* Iason. I want to be with Iason...." Riki felt the hand that had been caressing him move to his throat and squeeze.

"Liar!"

Suddenly Guy's full weight was atop him and the hand at his throat squeezed even harder.

"I won't let him have you! He broke you, but I can fix you again. I can fix you! I love you, Riki! You won't be his! You won't!"

"G...Guy!" Riki gasped even as black spots started to form behind his eyes.
"S....stop...."

"I'll make it right." Guy's mouth descended onto Riki's, ravaging and plundering with such desperation. "We'll die together this time, and we'll be free from him forever."

"G...Guy."

Riki was starting to black out from being choked and for a frightening moment he really thought he was going to die. The visions of Dana Burn came flooding back to him again, the fear and pain, the defeat and anguish, and the final peace as the Black Moon cigarette toxin entered his lungs and he fell asleep against Iason; who had held him through it all.

"I...Ias...on."

Suddenly the weight was removed and he heard a heavy thud. An unfamiliar voice said.

"I told you he was insane, you shouldn't have let him see the mongrel."

"It matters not. Soon all three will be dead."

Orphe!

A caressing hand replaced the brutal one that had been at Riki's throat and it made him flinch.

"Not to worry, pet. Your master will be here soon and I will enjoy letting him watch as you are mated with my special collections, before I kill you

and your master."

Riki moved his lips, as if trying to speak.

"What's that, pet?"

Riki repeated his attempt.

"Did the mongrel damage your voice?"

Riki could feel the brush of Orphe's hair as the Blondie leaned closer to hear what he was trying to say and he lifted his lips upwards, then sunk his teeth into the android's ear.

Orphe yanked back, startled at the sudden pain. "Mongrel scum!" He back handed Riki, hard, across the face. "Obviously Iason did not teach you properly. Bring me the wand."

Riki tensed, but would not show fear to this cretin. "Fuck you!" he spat, his voice raspy from being choked. "When Iason...get's here he's gonna rip you a... new f...fucking asshole you Blondie cunt!"

He knew it was coming, had braced for it, but it had been a long time since he had felt the powerful rush of pain from a wand and his body arched in response as several kilowatts of energy sparked through him. That was fine, he thought through gritted teeth, pain was just pain, he'd felt it before. No one was a worse pain master than Iason Mink.

When the wand removed his throbbing body fell slack again in relief.

"Not so brave now, are you?"

Riki managed to smile through the pain. "First, Iason is gonna s...shave you bald-headed, then I'm gonna piss... all over you, while you watch us fuck!"

The wand hit him again, and even though he was prepared, he couldn't help the grunt of pain that accompanied it. He was released, and a brace was shoved into his mouth to prevent him biting his tongue, that was when he knew it was about to get bad, really bad.

"Let's see if we can't tame that vulgar mouth of yours, *pet.*"

Riki's mind screamed for Iason as the wand touched his skin again, and again, and again.

Chapter 22

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason is glad for old friends and Riki is shown the face of a fiend

He's here," Katze advised and watched Iason struggle to rise from the sofa to a more imposing height, before allowing their visitor inside.

"Iason!" Quick as lightening Raoul moved past the older furniture to throw his arms around his friend. "So it is true. You are alive!"

Iason could feel his legs tremble beneath the effort to maintain his stance, he had not expected such an emotional and physical reaction from the pet manufacturer. "Yes. I regret keeping the news from you, however there were complications and as you will see, I was right to wait."

"It matters not." Raoul hugged him once again then stepped back. "I am simply glad you..." He paused. "Something is wrong. What is it? Were you injured? You appear unwell."

"I am fine, Raoul, and I did not bring you here to fuss over me. I have a problem and I require your assistance."

"Of course, you have it." Raoul stepped back and settled in a chair, giving Iason the opportunity to sit back down as well, with some relief. "You must tell me everything, however. We were all so shocked at the news of your death, and I could find no cause or explanation for it. What happened to you, Iason? Was this all a ploy of some kind? If so it was an ill advised one."

"It was not a planned decision. I did die, Raoul, however Katze recovered my body with the help of Jupiter and she managed to revive me."

Raoul glanced at the red head who stood quietly by the door. "How did he do that?"

Katze glanced at Iason for permission before answering. "Jupiter told me where to find Iason and Riki and where to bring them when I recovered their bodies."

Raoul's expression darkened. "The mongrel also lives?" He looked at Iason. "Tell me that our God did not resurrect that troublesome pet of yours?"

"It was her choice to do so and I am grateful for it," Iason replied calmly. "I understand you have never approved of Riki, Raoul, but nor have I ever required your approval. It is a fact that it is Riki that inspired me to contact you."

"I do not understand."

"He has been taken by Orphe."

Raoul blinked, startled. "What would Orphe want with your..." He paused as the answer became clear. "Surely he is not so much of a fool?"

"It appears he is every bit of one, and as I am limited in power at the moment, I require your help, Raoul."

"To save the mongrel," Raoul snapped, bitterly.

"To save Tanagura. This is not just about Riki, Raoul. Orphe obviously feels threatened by my rumoured return and is determined to make sure I remain dead."

"He cannot harm you, Iason. No Blondie can physically harm another, it is forbidden."

"He cannot be tried for killing one who is already dead, Raoul."

The Blondie actually paled, then tightened his lips into a firm line. "He *is* a fool. I will not deny that he has always been ambitious and envious of your position, Iason, but to believe he is capable of such a thing..." He shook his head. "Still, there are few who have been satisfied with how he has run the syndicate since your disappearance. He is attempting to bring us back into

the origin stages, requesting reinstatement of laws that were abolished a century ago."

"He cannot return the old ways..." Iason began.

"No, however his methods are cunning and calculating. He has developed new laws that are very close to the old ones, with only a few minor changes so as to make them seem new again. He is using your relationship with your pet as his platform, stating that you were seduced by a slum mongrel into giving up valuable, secured information about the Syndicate."

"I have never given up any information," Iason returned calmly. "And his slander only proves further that he is incapable of handling the power he has adorned himself with."

"I agree, however there are a few brothers that share his opinions, to an extent. He has increased the insurance prices for the shop keepers in Midas, as well he has decreed that furniture can no longer be kept after the age of twelve."

Iason watched Katze stiffen. "And what does he say is to be done with them after that?"

"They are to be terminated and replaced with a fresh model."

Iason glanced towards the doorway, where Cal had just appeared with their drinks. The boy had just turned thirteen, and if this law was now in effect in Tanagura, he could not take the boy home with him. "What is his basis for the need of this change?"

"He says that upon adolescence furniture become unruly and more difficult to manage."

"That's bullshit!" Katze said before he could stop himself. He flushed and lowered his head when both Blondies looked towards him.

Iason watched Raoul accept a drink from Cal's tray, then he took his own, was proud that the boy's hands remained steady. "And the other brothers

agreed to this?"

"Orphe used Daryl as a frame of reference, a furniture that got out of control by allowing a pet to go free." Raoul lifted his gaze to the red-head in the corner. "And your name was mentioned as well, for the mischief you got into before Iason reassigned you."

"Well, I will deal with that when I return." While his reply was to Raoul, his eyes and his promise was on Cal. It surprised him how much he had come to care for the boy, how much he wanted to protect him. Perhaps it was from opening his heart to Riki that made him so sentimental. "He is a fool to raise the insurance on the business owners, that will make them resentful and they will start hiding money. The payment margin we currently have is more than adequate and is advanced every year, based on their profits. To harangue them into giving more will breed animosity and deceit. Orphe should know better."

"In all honesty, Iason, if I did not know that Orphe was a Blondie I would begin to suspect he was suffering from some sort of mental degradation. I believe that he has become intoxicated by the power he now has."

"It is fine to use such power to keep others in line, but to abuse it beyond sensibility of what is good for the Syndicate is irrational...."

Raoul smirked. "Did you not do the same with your pet?"

"No. Those were personal choices and had nothing to do with the syndicate or my position. Everyone's objections to how I treated Riki, or even my having him, were based purely on emotional prejudice. My personal life is my own, and it will remain so. It has never interfered with my business acumen."

"You don't call being killed an interference?"

"An oversight at best." Iason set his wine down. "Now, we have wasted enough time. May I count on your support to find and rescue Riki, Raoul?"

"Of course I will help you. We need you back where you belong, my friend, and Orphe must realize that more than anyone."

Iason nodded. "I am relieved to hear you say that, for I am not up to my usual strength and will require your assistance with several things."

"Do you know yet where they are holding Riki?"

"Yes, they did not make it difficult. I am sure that they realized with Katze's underground connections finding them would be simple. As well, I know they are laying a trap for me."

Iason felt a shiver run down his body and tried to ignore it. The circumstances were so similar to Dana Burn that he could not help feel uneasy about what the outcome might be. He did not want to lose Riki a second time, and he did not believe Jupiter would be as forgiving if he once again deliberately put himself in such a situation.

"I have people we can trust, they can be here within the hour." Raoul sat back and stroked his chin. "As for Orphe, we will have to find a way to deal with him properly."

"Yes, he will be a problem," Iason concurred. "However, Katze has made a suggestion that may be to our benefit and not violate the rule of non-violence against another Blondie."

"You would trust such a delicate situation to a furniture?"

"His instincts and decisions have never given me any cause for doubt, Raoul. After all, I do owe my life to him."

Raoul chose to ignore that last sentence. "It would have to be approved by Jupiter."

"It has been," Katze advised, quietly.

Raoul's eyes narrowed on him. "How would you know?"

"He speaks to Jupiter regularly to update her on my progress," Iason said.

Raoul rose to his feet. “How is that possible? He is not a child of Jupiter, and only an Elite can get into the viewing room!”

“He does not need to be in the viewing room, Jupiter speaks to him as she does, on occasion, with us, telepathically.”

Raoul shook his head. “But...he is a human!”

Iason smiled. “He is a most exceptional human, Raoul, and I ask that you give him the respect he deserves from this point forward.”

Katze flushed, felt his body tremble in pleasure at such high praise from his master, though none of this was conveyed in his expression; he had been well trained as a furniture after all to never show his emotions.

Raoul moved closer to Katze, curious, and stared at him, hard. “How does it feel when a God speaks to you?”

“Hurts like a son of a bitch,” Katze admitted truthfully. “But I’ve gotten used to it.” He was startled when Raoul actually smiled and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Invasive thing, isn’t she?” he smirked. “I hate it myself.” He turned back to Iason before Katze could manage a reply. “Well then, we have the who, how and why, now let’s discuss what is really wrong with you, Iason.”

“I have told you...”

“I am a scientist and a physician, do not try and play games with me. When I embraced you your body trembled, and while it would be lovely to imagine it was from the joy of seeing me again, I know it was not.” He stood before Iason, crossed his arms over his chest. “The truth, or I will not help you.”

Iason swallowed a sigh and explained his dilemma.

Riki opened his eyes to darkness once again, shivered against the cold, dampness of the room but almost immediately realized that he was curled up on something soft. A bed? He tried not to think about how much pain he was in as he climbed unsteadily to his feet and searched with his hands to see where he was. He heard a clank and felt the pinch of a metal cuff around his ankle.

Where was Guy, he wondered? How long had he been here? Was Iason on his way?

A blinding light flickered overhead, he blinked several times as his eyes attempted to adjust, and as he did the vision of a well dressed Blondie filled his view. Orphe sat in a plush chair just far enough away that Riki's chained leg prevented him from reaching him, with one leg calmly crossed over the other as he sipped wine.

There were several pets standing behind him, and two curled at his feet, a tall blue-haired Elite stood just to his right and three other guards, humans, waited behind them. Riki thought it amusing that the Blondie needed such protection from one little slum mongrel.

"Finally, you are awake."

"And what an ugly sight to wake up to," Riki snarled as he remained standing, despite the abuse his body had suffered; he'd had worse after all, he reminded himself, and pulled at the shackle on his ankle. "Are you ready to give up yet?"

Orphe laughed. "I can see why Iason likes you, you are very entertaining." He waved his hand. "This is not about you, it is about Iason. I have no real desire to harm you, Riki."

"Yeah, right."

"I speak the truth. In fact, if you so desire, once this ugly business is over I will free you from your master's grip." He held up a data pad. "I have here

your pet registration number. With one touch I can delete you permanently from the system and you are free to return to Ceres."

Riki would not have been human if he did not actually consider the deal. Iason had set him free once before, but had not cancelled his registration, so his freedom had been a lie. However, it was the fact that he was a registered pet to Iason Mink that had probably saved his life when the Midas cops picked him up that time.

Iason had offered him freedom a second time when he was revived from the dead, and still Riki had been unable to trust that promise; at least until last night. Was it only last night that he had admitted his confusion and fear to Iason. Only twenty-four hours since he'd asked to be held by the Blondie and driven to the heights of unthinkable ecstasy? Had it been longer? How many days had it been since he'd had that swim on the beach in the moonlight?

Still, this was a Blondie, and as he had told Guy, Blondies couldn't be trusted. "Where is Guy?"

"Does it matter? He tried to kill you."

"It matters. Where is he?"

"He is in another room, resting. I believe the sight of you alive was too much for him to take, so he has been given a sedative. No harm will come to him. As I explained, I want only your master."

"If that is true, then how about taking off this chain?"

"Well now, I can't have you running away before Iason gets here, that would ruin everything, but I give you my word that once this is over, you and your friend will be free."

"What's the catch?"

Orphe rose, slowly like a predator about to pounce on its prey. He walked over and caught Riki's chin. "What is the saying you mongrels have? Quid

pro quo?"

Riki didn't bother to struggle, he knew his attempts would be useless against an android, and he wouldn't get far anyway, chained to the wall. "Be specific. I don't make a deal unless I know the details."

Orphe smiled and ran a gloved finger across Riki's bare bicep. "I see, and is that what you did with Iason, negotiated who gets to be on top?"

"Jealous?" Riki watched the Blondie's eye twitch, the gloved hand tightened painfully on his arm, and knew he had hit a nerve.

"I admit that I am curious as to what you have that has so enraptured the favored son of Jupiter." He leaned in and inhaled Riki's scent. "Is there some special technique, some biochemical that you excrete that enables you to seduce a Blondie so easily?"

Riki had never seduced Iason, well except for that first time. Even he didn't understand what it was about him that made Iason want him so much. "What can I say, I *am* all that."

"Hmmm." Orphe's hand slid down and gripped Riki's flaccid penis, hidden only by the thin cloth of his swimming trunks. "Disappointing. There is nothing to *that* at all."

Riki slapped his hands away. "Go mangle your own pets, you pervert."

The Blondie stepped closer, gripped him harder, impressed when Riki did not even flinch. "Do you like pain, pet?" he whispered in Riki's ear. "Is that how Iason keeps you so submissive?"

"Is that how you like it?" Riki whispered and brushed his lips against Orphe's, felt the Elite stiffen in surprise. "You wanna taste a bit of this mongrel too, Blondie?"

Orphe stepped back, staggered by the feel of the boy's lips against his. The mongrel's soft kiss had frightened him, confused him. What was this...feeling that grew inside of him? This almost overpowering need to

push the boy down and do dirty things to him? He wanted more, more of that taste, that touch...Perhaps it was just a fluke? Perhaps if he did it again he would understand it better and this strange feeling would dissipate?

He stepped forward, gripped Riki's hair and yanked him forward for another kiss, for one more taste to be sure, only to have Riki turn his head at the last second and hiss in his ear.

"Iason has made people disappear for so much as looking at me. I'm gonna enjoy watching him make you bleed, Tin Man."

Orphe shoved him backwards, hard enough that Riki literally bounced off the wall. The young man's quiet chuckle further agitated him, but he refused to show it. With deliberate control he returned to his chair. "To prove my generosity, I will allow you to make the selection, so you may better enjoy today's activities."

"Selection?" Riki rose to his feet again and frowned. "What are you talking about?"

Orphe gestured to the pets that surrounded him. "Stand so he may see you properly," he ordered and they all obeyed.

Riki counted six in all, three girls and three boys all of them beautiful in that artificial way all pets were.

"As you can see, I have collected both sexes, as I was not sure what your preference would be. Most mongrels seem to prefer the males, but would you not also like to try it with a female? There will be no punishment this time if you do, only pleasure."

"What do you have planned for Iason?"

"That does not concern you. Now, if you will make your choice, we can begin..."

"If you think I'm gonna willingly fuck some pet just so you can get your jollies you're sicker than I thought, Orphe." Riki watched two of the guards

step forward, but were stayed by the Blondie's hand. "Isn't it frustrating knowing you will never be on Iason's level?"

Riki watched Orphe's fingers tighten on his wineglass.

"Your mouth is as vicious as rumored, mongrel, but no matter. If you will not choose, then you will mate with all of them."

"Not gonna happen."

"No? I believe we can change your tune." He waved to the Elite beside him. "Kanin, if you will."

Riki stepped back when he saw Blue-Hair move forward with a flask of liquid as the three other men followed. No, no, no! He sucker punched the first man and knocked him cold, then managed to flip the second, even with the chain on his leg, but when Kanin grabbed him, his struggles were useless. This man was an android, a son of Jupiter and every bit as strong as Iason.

He bit and scratched, tried to turn away, to keep his mouth shut, but the Kanin was quicker and stronger and forced the aphrodisiac down his throat. He tried to spit it back up, but most of it had already made it to his stomach and almost instantly he could feel the familiar affects.

"F...fuck you," he muttered as the Elite dropped him to the floor and stepped away, while the other two carted off the unconscious third.

He would not respond, he would not respond, he would...shit! He could feel the fever taking over his body, causing his skin to become horrifically sensitive and all the boiling blood rushed down to settle in his groin. Rising slowly to his feet, he tried to ignore the need to touch himself as Orphe gestured and a young male pet stepped forward.

Riki bared his teeth, curled his hands into fists and the pet hesitated, glancing back at his master. He would not allow them to touch him, no matter how badly he wanted it. He would not!

"Come back," Orphe ordered the boy, who curled back by his feet and accepted a soft caress. "Let's allow him some time to enjoy the full effects, then he will be more than willing to mate with you."

Riki's breathing was growing erratic, this...these drugs were different than the ones he'd had before, they were stronger, making his head swim, and sent a shattering pulse of need through him. He paced, like a wild animal for almost ten minutes before the full effects took hold and he moaned.

No. He had to be strong, he would not do this, not in front of Orphe, and yet, he found himself sliding down the wall and his hand dipping into his swim trunks. He yanked it back, pulled it behind him and bit his lip hard enough to taste blood.

"Shackle him to the bed," Orphe instructed and his guards moved forward.

Once again Riki tried to fight, but the drugs in his system made it almost impossible and he soon found himself bound to the bed, spread eagled.

Orphe rose. "We'll leave you for a little while," he decided. "Janyn will remain behind in case you require assistance." He stroked the young girl's cheek. "Do not touch him unless he asks, pet. Make him plead for it."

"Yes, master."

Everyone else left except a guard at the door, Riki cursed them all. This was bad, this was so, so bad. When the girl stood at the end of the bed he closed his eyes. He couldn't look at her; she was really pretty and right now his body was craving her touch, anyone's touch and she was dressed as all pets were; in black skimpy clothing.

"I can help you," she said quietly and moved her hand over the baseboard towards his leg. "You cannot fight the stimulants and I can give you pleasure."

"Don't fucking touch me!"

She flinched, glanced upwards and Riki followed her gaze to the camera lens in the corner, then reached for him again. "Doesn't it hurt you?"

Riki gritted his teeth and tried not to arch off the bed at the pure intensity of the sensations that filled his body. He took deep breaths, wound up panting like a dog, then tried to rub his legs together, to receive even a little friction, but he was too tightly bound.

"Please, you must ask me to help you. My master has ordered me to, and he can be very cruel if I disobey."

God, he wanted to accept that help, he wanted her to touch him, suck him, fuck him, anything to ease the growing arousal in his body. This was worse, worse than what Iason had given him after Mimea, worse than any level of the cock ring he had endured for so many years.

He was fighting a losing battle, sure that his skin would crawl off his body at any minute, and that his pounding heart would leap out of his chest to land on the floor. This was madness, this craving, this....desire was not even pleasurable it was almost all pain, a delicious, torturous pain that muddled his mind and denied his focus.

Instead, he hardened his heart against her, he couldn't afford sympathy. "My...Iason will rip your tits off if you...mmmmnnh.... lay a f...finger on me," he hissed. "Orphe is a fucking haa haa...kitten next to Iason, so t...trust me, you do *not* want to p...piss him off...fff....fuck!"

"I cannot touch you until you ask me to. You must ask me!"

"I.....won't!"

"You cannot endure this! They gave you five times the usual dosage, you must comply!"

Five times? Oh shit, no wonder he was having so much trouble with it this time. "P...please, just...leave...." A heightened sensation of pleasure mixed with pain shot through his groin and he arched off the bed. "F...fuck!" Was

it getting worse? Was there more to this shit that he hadn't felt yet? Oh God. Oh God!

Riki closed his eyes again, bit hard on his lip, enough to draw blood, but the taste of it only seemed to arouse him more. No...NO! He started to writhe, his body was flame, his lungs filled with acid so that each breath was excruciating. His dick was so hard he was sure it was going to crack off or explode at any moment; all he could do was silently laugh at the irony, since he had already lost it once before.

A hand touched him, but it was not Iason's, he knew Iason's touch and this one was softer, kinder. He flinched. "Don't touch me!" he screamed at the girl, his glazed eyes burning into hers as she scrambled back off the bed. "Don't you fucking touch me, you bitch! I'll kill you!"

"Please!" the pet cried, distressed as she wrung her hands. "You have to let me help you! It won't stop until you do. You have to ask, please!"

"No....Never...." He heard the voice of his master and tears filled his eyes as the Blondie suddenly appeared and walked towards him. "Iason. Iason, please...help me...help me...I...I can't...it hurts...please..."

"Let me help you!" Janyn cried.

Riki yanked viciously against his chains he tried to reach Iason, and felt a strange moistness at both his ankles and wrists. "I'm sorry. I...won't do it again. I only...d...did it once. P...please. Come... need to...come...take me, please, Iason. Make it s...stop."

Orphe scowled at the camera monitor outside the room as the mongrel stared at the wall and appeared to be talking to...nothing. Janyn was on the floor sobbing, and there was blood dripping from the mongrel's hands and feet. "What is he doing?"

"He's hallucinating," Kanin advised, quietly. "I warned you that the dosage was too high...."

"Nonsense." Orphe stepped back into the room, followed by his pets and flicked his wrist towards Riki. "Check him."

Kanin crossed over, removed a small instrument from his cloak pocket and held it over the writhing mongrel's body. "His blood pressure and heart rate are nearing critical levels, Orphe. We must bring him down or it will kill him."

Orphe sighed. "What a troublesome creature," he decided as he waved two of his other pets forward, one male and one female. "Go, pleasure him."

They moved forward, climbed onto the bed and started to touch Riki. Janyn, having received permission from her master hurried to straddle him. "We'll make it good for you," she promised as she leaned down and started to lick his chest. "You'll enjoy it, I promise."

Riki tried to shrug them off, tried to pull away, to bite, but his bindings did not allow for enough movement to do so. "I don't want this! P...please...Don't do this!"

"We have to," one of the boys advised as leaned in behind Janyn. "Our master commands it." He freed him from his swim shorts and slid Riki's hardened organ into his mouth with practiced ease.

Riki gritted his teeth and closed his eyes. "Stop," he moaned, but he didn't want them to stop.

The drugs inside of him craved their touch, anyone's touch, but he couldn't help feeling like he was betraying Iason. A tear slid down his cheek and he watched Iason slowly disappear from his view, deserting him because he was having sex with another.

"Don't...n...no....Iason...Iason! Come back...p...please...m...master...take me...with you..."

Riki felt a sharp pain of pleasure at a moist warmth around his cock, then suddenly couldn't breathe and the world faded to black.

"Damn it!" Kanin practically tossed the pets off the young man. "He's going into cardiac arrest! Bring me my kit, now!"

Orphe moved closer, curious as he watched the doctor start CPR on Riki. "Will he die?"

"Yes!" Kanin glared at the superior Elite. "And if he does you will lose whatever bargaining chip you may have with Mink."

Orphe scowled. "Yes, I suppose we will have to keep him alive until Iason arrives at least."

Kanin accepted the bag of medical devices one of the human guards brought in and he pulled out a syringe.

"Are you giving him a sedative?"

"No, a sedative will kill him in this state, this is adrenalin."

"Why would..."

"Because his heart has stopped!" Kanin turned back and stabbed Riki in the chest with the large needle, ignoring the gasps of the pets still in the room. Retrieving a small, rounded monitor he attached it to the side of Riki's neck, then resumed CPR. "Come on, breathe, damn you."

"You have been working among the humans too long, Kanin," Orphe decided. "You have picked up their vulgarity and emotional tantrums."

Kanin ignored Orphe and felt some relief when the monitor on Riki's neck started to flash blue in a slow rhythm. "His heart has started again, now we need to flush the drugs out of his system before they can do any further damage."

"Wait a moment, he has yet to be mounted by any of my pets!"

Kanin turned and glared at Orphe. "Unless you're into Necrophilia, that will have to wait. He is in no shape for it now."

Orphe sighed again. "How troublesome, and here I thought he was made of sterner stuff." He waved to his pets. "Come my dears, we'll let the doctor fix up your toy and you can play with him later." He paused, turned back to Kanin who was waving another instrument over Riki's body. "You are not being too sympathetic with the mongrel, I hope, Kanin. I would hate for you to have to join Iason in the great beyond."

"He means nothing to me, but as a patient."

Orphe stared hard at Kanin, then nodded and left. One of the guards remained inside the door as Kanin continued to work on Riki.

"This is madness," he muttered to himself as he gave Riki a shot in the arm with a serum that would counteract the aphrodisiacs he had been dosed with. He stared down at the unconscious form, then remembered the boy's other injuries. "Guard, remove his shackles."

"I should check with Master Orphe..."

"You do not need to check, do as I tell you! I am still an Elite and you must obey me."

The guard moved forward and did as he was told, then Kanin started to treat and wrap Riki's wrists and ankles.

"What a mess you've made of yourself, boy."

He knew that Iason Mink would be furious at the sight of his pet at that moment, it was hard not to feel some sympathy for the poor mongrel. In a rare moment of affection Kanin ran his hand through Riki's long, dark hair.

"You really are something special aren't you? Well, I hope for your sake your master gets here soon."

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for the long wait everyone, I just got back from my holiday yesterday and sat right down to get something written to send off to you. I hope you enjoy it and don't find it too over the top. This story

seems to be taking on a life of its own, I never expected to still be writing it, and even I don't know what is going to happen! I should have listened to Cal, he warned me things were going too well...LOL. I will probably need to stop soon though or it'll end up being fifty chapters and that would be crazy!!

If you enjoy this chapter please, please review. I am in desperate need of feedback (aren't I a bossy old lady?) I apologize if there were any typo's, although I did check it twice before submitting.

Chapter 23

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki needs to break free and find Iason, but can he?

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey everyone, sorry it has been sooooo long since I updated but holidays suck ass and I had absolutely no time to write. Then when I did finally get time, I wasn't happy with what I had written previously so had to rework it a bit. I hope you like it just the same, and if you do please review/comment. I should be able to get another update up by the weekend this time (fingers crossed)

Guy was slamming his good shoulder against the door of his room repeatedly, calling out to be released, but he was ignored. It wasn't supposed to be like this! He and Riki were supposed to be together and Orphe had promised not to harm Riki.

"What the fuck is going on!" he screamed and banged on the door, kicked at it and still no one came.

He turned, slumped against it and put his hand to his face. It wasn't supposed to be like this. All he was trying to do was save Riki from that bastard Blondie and now; just like Dana Burn; he'd put them both in danger.

Why couldn't Riki understand he was trying to help? *His* Riki would understand. His Riki would have gone with him the first time, no questions asked, but...He glanced down at his hand, saw it wrapped around Riki's throat and shivered.

He had almost killed Riki, would have choked his friend to death had he not been pulled off by Orphe's goons and all because of his obsessive hatred for Iason Mink. Orphe seemed to share that hatred and so it had made sense that he should make use of his connections with the Blondie to get rid of Mink once and for all. It's what Riki would have done to save him, Riki would have made the deal with Orphe without a second thought, he was sure of it.

But, Riki had insane instincts when it came to people, or he had before he'd gotten caught up with Iason, and he had warned Guy that Orphe couldn't be trusted. Even faced with the reality that once again it was Guy that was responsible for putting him into a bad situation, Riki had still tried to warn him against Orphe. Riki was still trying to protect him.

"Damn it!" Guy slammed his hand against the door, then put his head against it and slid to his knees. He'd screwed up again. He screwed up so bad.

When he had woken up in a medical facility weeks, a little over six months ago, he had not even recognized his own face. The nurse claimed he was just another worthless slum mongrel that should be kicked back to the streets, but he had no clue to his own identity or why he was missing his left arm.

Then, one day a man with red-hair came to visit him.

'Do you know who I am?' Guy demanded.

'You're nobody and you need to stay that way.'

'Why? What happened to me? Who are you?'

'It doesn't matter.' The man tossed him a satchel of credits. 'Take this, it's enough to live on for a few months, the rest is up to you. I don't care if you spend it all on drugs, women or whatever you want, just don't come back here to this place.'

'I don't understand! What did I do? What...what happened to my arm? Was I in an accident?'

"I did what I was asked to do. My debt is paid, now you're on your own."

The man had walked out and never returned.

Guy had taken the credits and took the first shuttle north, towards a place called Ceres. The nurses had mentioned he had looked like a mongrel from Ceres, so that was the place he would search for his identity. He did not recognize anything once he was there, or anyone; but life there seemed extremely unpleasant and desperate.

Leaving Ceres, he kept tight hold of his credits, using them sparingly and sleeping outside in a shelter or tool shed when he could find it, then roaming the lands; looking for something, anything familiar. He felt like he was searching for someone, but he didn't know who. A face haunted his dreams, a man with dark eyes and dark skin, but the vision faded the moment he woke and he could never hang onto it long enough to form a memory.

He found himself being drawn to a desolate place of rubble and sand on the outskirts of the city. There was something familiar about the place, something about the place made him feel angry and sad and so many other things. He felt as if he had lost something in that place, something important, but he couldn't remember what.

Eventually he found himself in Midas, but it was hard to find work. With only one good arm most people just turned him away, but he knew his credits wouldn't last forever so he had to find work soon. He had no skills to speak of because he had no memories, which made it even more difficult to convince people to give him a chance.

Finally, he found a job in a bath house in Midas, because the land-lady who ran it took pity on him. He learned how to clean, accept payments and several other things with his good arm, and it seemed a natural progression when the land-lady asked if he wanted to work as a towel boy for more money.

A towel boy was someone who adhered to whatever the client's in the bathhouse requested; which could include washing a client's back, or any other part they wished, serving them drinks, or sitting in the baths with them and letting them grope you. That was the basic service, but a premium service would also involve sex in the bath.

Guy was not making enough money with the basic service, because most clients seemed doubtful he could be of use with only one arm, so he agreed to be part of the premium service; he didn't need to have all his limbs for some pervert to screw him. It had disgusted him at first and he threw up a few times afterwards, but after awhile he got a few regulars and it wasn't so bad. He was tall, with a good body and most said he also a pretty face, so he made it work for him.

It seemed second nature for him to pay attention to the conversations in the bathhouse, even with some pervert screwing him while discussing business with two or three of his associates; also in the bath. He learned there was money to be earned from such information and thus began his relationship with an Onyx named Shiao.

Shiao came to the baths twice a week and always requested Guy, but only for the basic service. Elites enjoyed having something pretty next to them, and so Guy would wash Shiao's body, serve him drinks, then sit quietly beside him in the bath. After awhile, they began to talk and that was how Guy learned that the information he had unconsciously gathered was actually worth something and that Shiao worked for a Blondie named Orphe.

Then, one fateful day, as Guy was coming back from a run for speciality supplies, he saw a young man with dark skin and long dark hair walking along the streets just outside of Pellin, along with the red-head Guy instantly recognized from the hospital.

Riki!

All of his memories came flooding back, so fast and swift that he'd passed out from the original onslaught. When he woke up, he remembered who he was, and who Riki was. He remembered the love and happiness during their

years together, and then the heartache and rage after Iason Mink had stolen his friend. He remembered setting explosives at Dana Burn, kidnapping Riki and cutting him.

Everything returned and with his memories, so too did his obsession reawaken. He stayed in that city, hoping for another sighting of his old pairing partner, but Riki never returned and eventually he returned to Midas, and worked his small information network to see if he could find anything more about his friend. It was then he heard the rumor about Iason Mink; realized that the Blondie could still be alive and that was why he hadn't seen Riki again. Mink had captured him again, which meant that it was up to Guy to save him; again.

It was because of that obsession that he had wormed his way into Orphe's good graces, Shiao had confirmed that if anyone hated Mink as much as Guy it was Orphe and he had suggested asking the Blondie for help. Guy had trusted Shiao and was desperate to have Riki back, so a bargain was struck with one devil to get rid of another. The enemy of my enemy is my friend; he had believed those words when Shiao had said them to him, because he was desperate. He had been a fool.

Now, he realized that Riki had been right; he never should have trusted a Blondie. He had been blinded by his obsession to get Riki away from Iason, and had landed them both in the hands of a madman. Orphe was now keeping them both prisoner; the Elite had gone back on his word, had destroyed all of Guy's plans and now...now Iason would be here soon and would take Riki back; unless Orphe actually managed to kill him.

I love him Guy.

Riki's words stabbed at his heart and made his stomach lurch, and Guy started to cry as he realized that Riki was no longer the beautiful and brave slum mongrel that had seduced him so many years ago. He was no longer the man who had become his friend and lover and who he had trusted his life to. No, Riki the Dark had died at Dana Burn, perhaps even before that, and the truth of that wounded Guy to the core.

Instead of helping his friend, all he seemed to do was hurt him. Riki was in love with a Blondie, or at least, Mink had somehow tamed Riki into believing that. Whatever the reason, the damage was done. He couldn't save someone that didn't want to be saved and while the very idea of his brave and rebellious friend being anyone's pet sickened him; he couldn't let things turn out like they had at Dana Burn. He couldn't let Riki stay in Orphe's clutches.

He started to slam his shoulder against the door again. This time he would save his friend for the right reason. This time, he wouldn't fail!

Orphe sat in his viewing room in the expensive villa he had rented, watching three of his pets fornicate, and finding no pleasure in it. Instead, he was thinking of a dark haired human that was chained to the wall in the cellar.

What was it about the mongrel that has enraptured Iason, had turned him from a proud impenetrable and stoic Elite to a pathetic breaker of rules? Why had no one else seen how damaged Iason had become?

What he was considering would mean breaking the number one rule for an Elite, but it was for the betterment of his kind. While it would need to be covered up for now, one day the people of Amoï would praise him for his deeds; for destroying the almighty Iason Mink.

It was a completely logical course; Iason's rumoured resurrection and return would mean that he, Orphe, would be ordered to step down as leader of the Syndicate. He couldn't allow that; he was just starting to make the changes needed to bring his brothers into a new era. He would change the face of Tanagura so no one would ever question their strength again; as is the way it should have been from the beginning.

Iason Mink was in the way of that goal and he would no longer serve Tanagura properly. He was doing the world a favor by getting rid of Jupiter's favorite son. No one would be the wiser as everyone already assumed he was dead. Wouldn't his Elite brothers be outraged to learn that their great leader was shackled up at a beach house with his mongrel pet all this time, and ignoring his duties? It would be sweet to tell them so, but if Orphe did that he put himself in a precarious position by eliminating Iason.

He could hear the sounds of his pets and for some reason, it annoyed rather than aroused. Would the mongrel make such noises? How would Riki look being mounted by Cajel, or sucked on by Janyn? He touched a gloved finger to his lips as he remembered their near kiss, felt himself harden unexpectedly.

"Get out!" he suddenly demanded, watched his pets falter in the throes of passion, startled. "Out I said! Get out of my sight!" He threw his wine glass at them as they scrambled to grab their clothes and hurry out of the room, bewildered by what had agitated their master.

Running a finger across his forehead, Orphe rose. He needed to learn the truth, that was all, he told himself as he stepped out and took the stairs to the basement. This was about learning the facts and he needed to have all the facts when dealing with Iason, didn't he?

He paused when he entered the dank cellar and spotted Kanin seated by their prisoner's side. "How is he?"

"Sleeping, he will probably be out for some time."

"Very well, leave us."

Kanin rose, looked like he wanted to argue, but nodded instead and moved towards the door.

"Take the guard with you."

Once he was alone, Orphe stood over Riki's bed. The boy was too old, he decided, too old to be a proper pet, and not really beautiful at all. His skin

was too dark, his body too muscular. Why had Iason chosen this boy?

Moving around the bed, he pulled back the thin blanket that Kanin had covered Riki with and ran a gloved finger across the mongrel's hard, smooth chest. "What is it about you?" he hissed, aggravated when he felt himself stir once more. "You are...exotic, I suppose; in a dirty sort of way."

Riki didn't stir.

Orphe focused on Riki's lips, and before he realized what he was doing he had leaned down and pressed his own lips against them. In his sleep, Riki's trained body immediately responded and Orphe watched as the young, supple body suddenly flushed with an intoxicating allure. Pulling back, he experimentally ran a finger across Riki's nipples, watched Riki arch in invitation and felt his arousal grow.

"So responsive," Orphe murmured in astonishment and moved closer with the urge to see how receptive a mongrel could be, only to be interrupted by the signal of his wrist device. "Yes?"

"We are having some difficulty with our surveillance feeds, sir. You requested notice of any unusual activity."

"I am on my way. Have the guards assume first position." Orphe stared at Riki wistfully then rose. "And so it begins. Soon I will have your master, and then..." He ran a gloved finger tip over Riki's soft lips. "Then I will have you."

Riki's eyes opened the moment he heard the door close. "Not fucking likely," he hissed, having woken to a strange beeping sound just in time to hear the Blondie's terrifying promise. He had to warn Iason, he had to keep him away from Orphe.

The lights had remained on inside the cellar so he could finally get a good look at his prison. His shackles were off and his ankles and wrists bandaged, and he was now free to move around. There were no windows, just the bed, a straight back chair beside it, the lab table he had been

chained to earlier, and the door across the room with a small palm panel on one side of it.

He glanced at the camera directly above him as a guard that entered and stood by the door. He sat up slowly and put his hand to his mouth, then he lurched over the side of the bed and dropped to all fours, as if were about to vomit. As predicted the guard immediately moved towards him.

“Hey!” he grumbled. “What’s wrong with you now?”

Riki moaned and lowered his head. “S...stomach...h...hurts.”

“Who the fuck cares, get back on the bed...”

As the guard reached his hand down to grab Riki by the shoulder, Riki rolled to the left, caught the man’s wrist and pulled him off balance. He wrapped his legs around the guard’s neck and squeezed, until the man passed out. If someone was watching the camera feed from another room then they would come bursting in, but if what he heard Orphe say was true and the main feed had been interrupted, he may have caught a break.

Riki kept his hostage and counted to thirty. When no one else hurried into the room, he shoved the man aside, stripped him and changed into his clothe, dismayed at how badly his hands were shaking. What kind of drugs had Orphe given him? He could remember clearly one of the pets trying to touch him and him threatening her, but everything after that was foggy and then blank.

He pulled his long hair up under the man’s cap, scooped up the long range laser, then hauled the unconscious guard over to the wall to place the man’s hand against the palm plate by the door. The door slid open and Riki cautiously peered out, no sign of anyone between him and the stairs leading up, just a small computer console with one monitor and a chair; which he assumed had been the guard's station.

He stepped out, paused and leaned against the wall when a wave of dizziness assailed him. It took a moment for it to pass, and when it did he slowly started up the stairs. Despite the fact that his body felt as though it

had been caught in between a fabric press and a heavy-duty cord stretcher; battered, scraped, and paper thin, he pressed forward, reminding himself he had felt far worse at the hands of Iason.

When he reached the top of the stairs, opened the door to the hallway, and had seen no one waiting for him he grew suspicious. Had they all been pulled away to deal with whatever caused the issue with the camera? Was Iason already here?

There was no way that Orphe had left him completely unattended so this had to be a trap of some kind. Maybe he was the bait for Iason? Maybe they were going to let him run outside and distract Iason long enough to capture or kill him. The idea that Orphe could be using him made him hesitate and he was still paused a figure came around the corner.

Riki dipped down behind a large planter and readied himself to tackle the person as they passed. He watched a shadow spread across the floor as the person grew closer to his position, but just when he thought they would pass, a voice said.

“I know you are there.”

Ignoring the leap of fear in his heart he slowly rose, lifted the weapon he had pulled from the guard and faced the bastard blue haired Elite that had injected him. “Don’t fucking move.”

“Fascinating,” Kanin returned, curious. “You shouldn’t even be able to stand, in your condition.”

“What did you give me?”

“You have a remarkable constitution, pet. I would be very interesting in running some tests...”

“Tell me, can an Elite survive with no head?” Riki warned as he focused the red laser sighting in the middle of Kanin’s forehead. “That’s a test I’d like to run.”

“Is this how you show gratitude to the man who saved your life?”

Riki blinked. “What...what are you talking about?”

“You went into cardiac arrest. You should thank me.”

The idea that he had nearly died, again, and couldn’t even remember it alarmed Riki. “You never should have put that shit in me in the first place!”

“I did what I was instructed to do,” Kanin returned. “Yet, I find that I am curious, what will you do next?”

“Where is Iason?”

“I have no idea.” Kanin suddenly tossed Riki a key card, proving he really wasn’t concerned about being shot. “You will find the other mongrel up the stairs and down the hall behind the third door on the left. Will you free him or kill him, I wonder? He is the reason you are here and did try to kill you, after all.”

Riki felt a wave of nausea sweep over him and almost staggered from the force of it, but he managed to keep his weapon trained on the Elite. Guy. Why did he have to come back, why did he have to get involved with Orphe of all people? Why hadn’t Katze erased his memory as he had asked?

Fuck! Riki didn’t have time to deal with this shit, and yet he was really the only one who could deal with it. He hated what Guy had done, hated that both he and Iason had been hurt by his friend’s obsession, and yet he still blamed himself for fuelling that obsession. What would he do? What should he do? Guy had to be stopped, once and for all. He couldn’t spend his life looking over his shoulder waiting for the other man to attack again and he couldn’t let Iason be hurt again. Would Guy listen if he tried to talk to him again, or would he turn to madness again?

“Hmmm, you actually hesitate to kill him.” Kanin moved swiftly and suddenly, gripping Riki’s weapon and free hand and pinning both against the wall. “Why? He has betrayed you and has hurt your master. How can you forgive such actions?”

Being slammed against the wall made Riki realize how bad a shape he really was in; not that he could fight an Elite even at his best, but his body suddenly shook with the effort it took to remain standing. “I have no master!”

“Really? But you were calling out for him earlier. Master, save me. Save me Master. Don’t you remember?”

Riki flushed with shame, attempted to struggle. “F...Fuck you!” God, had he really said that? He gathered what little strength he had left and spit in Kanin’s face. “Kill me or let me go, you impotent piece of shit. I haven’t got the time to play your fucking games.”

Instead of anger or offence, which was what Riki had expected to be the Sapphire’s reaction, Kanin laughed.

“Ah, well, since you put it like that.” Kanin released Riki and stepped back. “Exactly opposite the room where your friend is, there is a den with a balcony overlooking the outside pool. It is a bit of a drop, but you just might survive it.”

“Why are you doing this?” Riki’s chest was heaving, his arms trembled with the exertion of lifting the weapon towards the blue-haired Elite again. “Is this part of Orphe’s sick game?”

“I’m a doctor, not a fortune teller.” Kanin slid his hands into his trouser pockets and started walking away. “I suggest you hurry, your path is currently unencumbered, however the video feed may only be disrupted for another few minutes and more guards will be dispatched.”

Riki watched him disappear around another corner, and unable to chance that the Elite might be telling the truth about Guy, he bolted up the stairs and down the corridor. His hands were shaking from both pain and adrenalin as he slid the card Kanin had given him into the reader and watch the door slid open.

“Riki!” Guy cried, joyously, as he suddenly found himself atop his friend on the floor outside his room. He’d hadn’t expected the door to actually

open, despite his continued attempts of throwing himself against it, and when it had he could not stop his momentum. “Thank God you’re okay.”

Riki’s eyes stung with moisture as he scrambled back against the opposite wall and aimed at the taller man. This was it; he had to decide now how to deal with Guy. Wiping his memory apparently hadn’t worked, neither had reasoning with him. He couldn’t allow this to happen again, not again.

“S...stop or I...I don’t want to kill you, Guy, but...I will...”

Guy froze in his position on his knees, staring at Riki and the laser that was suddenly trained on him. “R...Riki.”

“I...You have to stop. You can’t...you have to...I can’t let you...”

Dear God, don’t make me chose, Riki screamed silently, and yet his finger curled around the trigger of the gun as he remembered the pain of being cut and the terrifying sounds of Dana Burn crumbling; the heat of the flames that licked at his skin as Iason held him and he slowly went to sleep. Don’t make me chose between you and Iason, his mind cried, because he knew that Guy would lose.

“It has to stop!”

Guy realized with a growing horror that Riki was serious. Despite Riki’s obviously injured state, his friend was ready to kill him. The desolate suffering in Riki’s eyes, the evidence of shame, fear and grief on the smaller mongrel’s face, and the uncontrolled shaking of that body that had always been so strong and sure forced Guy to face the enormity of what he had done

“I...I’m sorry, Riki,” he whispered and felt something inside of him break. He lowered his head, a dog on all fours waiting for punishment. “I’m so fucking sorry! You were right about Orphe, about me about everything. I really fucked up, I never meant...”

“You never meant?” Riki whispered and felt rage fill him. “Do you have any...any idea what you’ve done? How badly you...you betrayed me and

everything we had?”

Guy sat back on his knees and lifted his head to glare at Riki with flashing eyes. “Didn’t you betray me first? You left me, Riki. You left me for Iason fucking Mink! To become his pet!”

“I left because I was suffocating in Ceres, Guy. It had nothing to do with you and I had never intended...” Riki shook his head. He wouldn’t apologize for Iason, not again. There wasn’t time for this. “This is my life now, you can accept it or not, but you can’t keep trying to save me when I don’t need to be saved!”

“So...what? Are you gonna kill me then?”

No, no he couldn’t kill Guy. Fuck!

“Come on, we have to get out of here.” Riki rose, grabbed Guy’s wrist and pulled him across the hall, slid the card into the reader at the door, but the light remained red. “Shit!” He tried again but the door would not open. Had his instincts been right and Kanin was part of the trap Orphe had set?

“Pull off the panel,” Guy insisted. “I can rewire it.”

“There isn’t time.” He had to get out of there and find a way to contact and warn Iason.

“Hey you!”

They spun in time to see the guard behind them raise his weapon. Riki went high and Guy dove low, taking the man down in an instant. Guy knocked him unconscious and took his weapon.

“Move!” Riki insisted and they ran down the hall.

They checked the other doors, Guy watching behind them for any more guards, but none of the doors would open with the card, so they headed up the next flight of stairs. The unmistakable sound of boots coming towards them from below proved that what Kanin had said was true and their few minutes were up.

“Mother fucker!”

“Here!” Guy hissed as he pulled Riki towards the first door he saw that didn’t have a card reader, then watched his friend flinch and pull back, even as the door closed behind them.

Guy locked the door, then regarded the small, circular stage, with two pairing tables, an assortment of erotic toys and mild restraints as well as a fully stocked bar in the corner. Opposite the stage was a lush sofa accented with colourful floor cushions.

“What the hell is this?”

“It’s...” Riki lowered his eyes away from the memories that the room resurrected. “It’s for a pet party. It’s where the masters watch their pets mount other pets.”

Guy regarded Riki closely as his friend moved to the window. He had been like the other mongrels of Ceres, slightly fascinated by the idea of the Elites and their pets, and then suddenly remembered when Riki had first returned, how reluctant he had had been to follow Kyrie’s suggestion to watch the pet auction in Midas. Was it because he had been a pet as well?

The idea of Riki being subjected to something like that was...appalling. “Did you...”

Riki ignored Guy’s unspoken question, unlatched the window and threw it open. It was a long way down and there was no pool to land in on this side of the house. There was a thin ledge just under the window that seemed to wrap around the villa, but it was more for decoration than substance.

Riki swung one leg out, balanced himself carefully and put his foot on the ledge; it was just wide enough, but would it hold him? He could probably manage the climb across, if the pool was on the other side he could jump and the water would mostly break his fall. If he was quick enough he could head Iason off and keep Orphe from laying his trap.

He glanced at Guy by the door and knew that the taller man would not be able to take this path with only one arm. But then, he still had to decide if he was going to let Guy live. Fuck! It was Dana Burn all over again. Despite what Guy had done to him before, Iason was going to suffer and possibly get killed because he couldn't deal with his old lover.

Guy sensed Riki's hesitation. "Go, Riki."

"I'm not leaving you."

"I'll be okay," Guy assured. "I'll get out another way..."

"You don't get it." Riki's gaze hardened, even as his heart shattered inside his chest. "I can't let this happen again, Guy." He slid back inside and curled his hand tighter around his weapon, once again aiming at Guy. "This has to stop, here and now. Do you understand?"

"Riki." Guy set down his weapon and lifted his hand. "This is my fault, I know that now. I won't bother you or Iason again, I swear, but...if you don't believe me then just kill me."

"I want to believe you, Guy." But could he take that chance? He'd let Guy live once and he got fucked a second time." Why couldn't you forget about me and Iason and everything and just live free from all that shit? Why did you have to do this again?"

"Because I love you," Guy answered simply. "Why did you try to protect me? Why didn't you try to stop me?"

Riki had tried to convince Guy to let him back, but he had to admit, he'd been reluctant to get physical. It wasn't until after he had woken up from the drugs Guy had slipped him, after he had been castrated that he had bothered to use the tracker on the watch that Katze gave him. If he knew that his pet ring would lead Iason to find him, but maybe if he had fought with Guy, tried to escape or used his watch sooner to alert Katze Guy would still have his arm and Iason never would have lost his ability to walk.

Why hadn't he acted sooner? Even now, he didn't have an answer.

"I drove you too it," he finally said. "I should have explained it better when I left Ceres, I should never have tried to contact you at all when I returned there, but I missed you and then,...then I was too ashamed to tell you the truth. What you did...I know you did it for me, I know that, but..."

"I did do it for you, Riki, or at least that was why I thought I was doing it, but I was being selfish too. I couldn't accept you bowing down to anyone, not you."

Riki had never intended to be that type of person either; he had never envisioned himself someone's pet. He'd always fought his own battles and stood up himself and his own. Iason had robbed him of that trait and he wasn't sure that he would ever forgive the Blondie for it. Now things were complicated, and it was no longer about him winning or Iason losing.

"It doesn't matter anymore." Riki tried to swallow the bile that rose in his throat. "I can't go back to what I was, or who I was before."

"That makes two of us. I didn't even know who I was when I woke up in the hospital. I had no memory of you or Iason, Why...did you ask them to do that?"

Riki nodded, grimly.

Guy took a step closer, watched Riki's aim steady and the red targeting dot appear on his chest. "When I saw you again it all came back to me and I knew I had to get you away from Mink again, but..." Guy's eyes glistened with unshed tears. "After Orphe locked me up it started to dawn on me what really happened. You said you died at Dana Burn. Tell me how. Tell me what happened?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does! Please!"

"This isn't the time, Guy!"

“I have to know, Riki! If you’re gonna kill me at least fucking tell me that much!”

Riki bit his lip hard enough to taste blood. “I...I found you, just after Iason did. You were hurt and then...the explosions started going off.” His hand started to shake again and his aim became unsteady. “I begged him to save you, Guy, and he did, because...”

Riki swallowed hard as he remembered that horrible moment and then several more past occurrences filtered into his memory. When Daryl had allowed him to escape and following his stubbornness with Iason in the medical center after he had been apprehended and returned. It was the day after that Iason had let him go free, at least he thought he had been free.

Then when he broke down after the attack in the salon, he’d begged Iason in a moment of weakness to get him out of Eos and a day later he was in Apatia and working for Katze with his own apartment. He was still a pet, but he’d won some freedom from Iason.

‘As pet you also had his protection, his resources and his attention. You were fed, clothed, given money, and if there was anything you really needed or wanted he would have provided it for you.’

“Riki?”

“Because *I* asked him to.” Riki’s aim grew steady again. Yes, Iason had done it because of him, because the Blondie knew that he would be devastated otherwise. “Iason saved you because I asked him too, and all you did was betray him again!”

“R...Riki.”

“You betrayed him, stole from him, hurt me and tried to kill him and still he saved you because I asked him to! But we couldn’t outrun the explosions and he was caught...trying to protect me.”

Guy blinked as shame filled him. “I...I never...”

Riki finished the rest in a rush, needing to get it out, wishing he could purge it from his memory so easily. "His legs were ripped off, he was critically hurt and couldn't walk and there was fire everywhere and the building was falling down around us and he told me to take you and go...So I did. I got you out and I gave you to Katze."

"Katze, does he have red-hair?"

"Yeah, he works for Iason."

"So...you saved me. After all I did you..." Guy shook his head. "Was it Katze that wiped my memory?"

"Yeah." Riki lowered his weapon, sighed and turned to the window. "I didn't want you to blame yourself for my death."

"But you said we got out. You got us out and..."

"I went back."

Guy stared at him in stunned silence.

"I couldn't let him die alone, Guy. Not after everything, not knowing he would have been free and clear if he hadn't tried to save us both, because I asked him too."

A single tear slid down Guy's cheek as he felt the last tendril of hope that Riki could be his again fade away, and yet he still pressed forward in vain by asking. "Because you owed him."

"No, it wasn't just that." Riki shrugged and turned back to him. "It was more...I knew it then, I just didn't want to admit it. I can say I did it because I owed him, but the truth...the truth is that I belonged to him and...I wanted to be with him; even in the end."

"Yeah," Guy slumped down on the sofa. "I guess you are dead then. My Riki, the Riki I knew back in Ceres is dead, you're someone else's Riki now."

Riki slowly nodded and felt a flutter of optimism that Guy might finally see sense. "I'm sorry. I wasn't strong enough, I couldn't resist Iason. I'm sorry, Guy."

"You are still the strongest person I know, Riki." Guy shook his head and slowly rose again. "But I won't be responsible for your death a second time. You are my *best* friend, Riki. You trusted me with your life once; please, trust me again." Guy indicated the window. "Go. Find Iason, do what you have to do and live your life. Use that second chance, Riki."

"Guy." Riki lowered his weapon, threw his arms around his former lover and squeezed him tight as a lump of emotion formed in his throat. "I'll...I can't...Guy. I'm sorry..."

"I know. I get it." Guy understood that this was the end for them. Riki would not ask Iason to save Guy a second time, and he would not look back once he was free. Guy would never see Riki again. "Just go. Try to be happy, okay? Promise me that much?"

Riki nodded, allowed himself one last, long look at Guy, then slipped the strap of the rifle over his shoulder and climbed out onto the ledge.

Chapter 24

Summary for the Chapter:

Riki escaping, An enraged Iason Mink and a maniac Blondie- Where do I come up with this stuff?

Notes for the Chapter:

This is more like several chapters on one, but I didn't think you'd mind and as I did not want to leave you with another cliff hanger (see I can be nice). Hope you enjoy it, I had so much fun writing it (and rewriting and rewriting again until I was properly satisfied). If you like it, please please review (I have no shame when it comes to that, I love feedback!)

"Orphe's villa is almost in sight, sir," the driver announced to his passenger's in the back seat of the vehicle.

Iason nodded. "Do it now," he ordered.

The car slowed to a crawl so that Raoul and Katze could dive out, under the cover of darkness, then the vehicle continued on down the road.

"Did you break anything, furniture?" Raoul asked as he rolled swiftly to his feet and looked down the road where the redhead had leapt from the car after him.

"I'm fine."

The Blondie swung around, startled. How the hell had he gotten behind him? He nodded, impressed. "You are quick on your feet, I will give you that."

"I asked for nothing from you," Katze said as they started into the trees. "I follow my master's orders."

"Your master has a penchant for finding unnecessary trouble. Perhaps it is time you had a new master."

"That is up to Iason." Katze was moving quickly and Raoul kept up with him easily; in fact he sensed the Blondie was actually slowing himself so as not to pass him by completely. "Don't wait for me, Raoul."

"We go together," Raoul stated. "If I leave you here you could get hurt and then Iason will be annoyed with me."

"I can take care of myself."

"I have not claimed otherwise, although, if you insist we move faster." Raoul suddenly scooped Katze up and over his shoulder as he started to run. "This would be better."

"What the....Put me down!"

"Hush now. This is an undercover operation and you are being far too loud."

Katze allowed himself to be carried as they covered the terrain at terrifying speeds.

Iason's vehicle pulled through the opening gates and drove up the curving drive of Orphe's villa to stop by the staircase that led up to the main door. There were several lights lining the house, as well as lamp posts that cast sufficient illumination against the pitch dark, moonless night.

He waited for the driver to open his door, using the time to conserve his strength and force his legs to move, then he stepped out as smoothly as he could manage; the epitome of a perfect Blondie in his red, blue and white slack suit and cloak and white gloves and boots.

"Iason Mink." Orphe appeared on the balcony above the doorway, two guards on either side of him, as well as a Sapphire Elite that Iason did not recognize, and a glass of wine in his hands. "The prodigal son returns."

"I believe you have something of mine, Orphe."

"Ah yes, your little pet." Orphe lifted his glass of wine in toast. "I must say, I can finally see why you chose him, Iason. He does handle pain very well."

Iason pushed back the rage that rushed up inside of him. He had an idea what Orphe was planning and if he was right, he needed to give Katze and Raoul time to do their jobs. "He does indeed."

"Is that why you keep him? Does he fulfill some sort of sadistic tendencies within you?"

"My reasons for keeping Riki are not your concern, Orphe. What is your concern is the fact that you have stolen from me and that will not be tolerated."

Orphe simply smiled. "You forget yourself, Iason. You are no longer the leader of the Syndicate, I am, therefore, you will award me the proper respect."

"I cannot award that which does not exist." Iason folded his hands behind his back. "While I find your delusions of grandeur mildly amusing, there can be only one true leader. You will, of course, be compensated for your efforts in my absence."

"Compensated?" Orphe snapped before he regained control. "You over estimate your appeal, Iason. Our brothers have delegated me as their leader now; and Jupiter has not contested their decision. Our creator understands that I am what our people need."

"A choice to remain silent does not constitute approval. Even you must know this."

"I will change the face of Tanagura, and restore propriety as ruler of all Amoï."

"Careful, my brother. Your words border on heresy."

"Hersey? What I do is for the betterment of our kind!"

"Your devotion is admirable, however Jupiter rules Amoï, we are but her tools. I am the last of thirteen, the perfect specimen and the favored son." Iason used his fury as strength to force his legs to slowly move toward the steps, appearing even more dangerous; a predator stalking its prey. "I *am* her strongest tool and her most divine weapon."

Orphe noticed the guards behind him had unconsciously backed up a little further on the balcony as Iason started to climb the steps below. "Stand your ground!" He lifted his right hand and a multiple red targeting beams focused on Iason's head and chest, the Blondie's forward movement ceased. "I am the voice of justice now, and it is time that justice was served."

"A dish served cold," Iason murmured as he scanned above with his enhanced vision, and spotted a dozen snipers lining the roof top.

"I beg your pardon?" Orphe asked, curious.

Iason turned his attention back to Orphe, just as the overhead lights flickered once, then glowed brightly once again. "It is an old Earth saying," Iason replied calmly and kept his eyes focused on his prey. "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

"I do not understand its meaning."

"I do not expect you to." Riki would understand it, Iason realized and almost smiled. He could not wait to hold his pet in his arms again; but before that, he would make Orphe pay for harming Riki. "I will ask this only once. Where is Riki?"

Katze dragged the man he had just knocked out behind a large sculpture, retrieved the access card and moved further down the corridor. He tried several doors on his way, but did not find Riki; unfortunately he could not linger as he had another mission to get to.

His palm computer brought up the villa's schematic and he located the room that housed the main power grid; second floor right side. He hurried

up the stairs and headed straight for that room. The access card did not open it, but his watch, much like the one he had given Riki, could bypass any lock.

Within ten seconds the panel light clicked green and the door opened. A blast of red fire came towards him and he ducked back. “Shit!”

He pulled a gas grenade from his belt, slid a small filter mask over his face and tossed the grenade inside. Within a minute the firing had stopped and all was silent. Stepping over the threshold, and the two bodies inside, he found the main computer panel and switched on the internal exhaust fans to suck out the lingering gas before working his magic on the console.

“It’s you!”

Katze spun around, raised his weapon and stared at Guy. “Fuck me! Didn’t I tell you to stay gone?”

“Are you here for Riki?”

Shit! Guy remembered Riki? How was that even possible? Was this damn mongrel responsible for this cock up too, as he had been for Dana Burn? The idea of it incensed him. “I should have tossed you back into that fucking fire and let you burn.”

“I almost wish you had.” Guy lowered his weapon. “I am part of this, but I never meant for Riki to get hurt.”

Katze crossed the room and grabbed Guy by the throat, and despite the fact they were almost exactly the same height and build, he lifted the younger man off the floor. “Where’s Riki? What have you done to him this time you bastard?”

“N...Nothing! We were...e...escaping! We got s...separated. I...Riki c...climbed outside.”

“Outside where?”

“The...house...on a ledge...t...three stories up...”

Kaze paled and let Guy drop, ignored the man's horrific gasps and coughing. "Are you fucking stupid? What if he falls?" Oh God! If Riki fell while escaping from that high up. Katze closed his eyes, even as a voice sounded in his ear.

'Are you done?'

"Fuck!" He didn't have time for Guy and there was no time left to go look for Riki now. He turned back to the console, his fingers flying over the keys, then crouched and reached his arm up inside the desk and ripped out the panel box. "If I were you, I'd disappear quickly because if Iason sees you, you'll lose more than just your arm this time." He pressed his finger to his earpiece to answer Raoul. "Done. You're good to go."

Katze moved out of the room and headed back down the stairs. "Not that way," Guy insisted. "There's a servant stairwell we can use and it isn't hooked up with any cameras."

"How do you know?" Katze demanded, even as he followed behind.

"Let's just say I found it. Where is Iason?"

"Why, you planning to blow him up again?"

Guy pressed the wall panel he had discovered on the first day he had come to the villa, cursed himself for not remembering it earlier with him and Riki. "Maybe, if I get the opportunity." The panel slid shut and they were in darkness for a moment, but then a dim set of orbs appeared on the wall leading down the stairwell. "Follow me."

"I am afraid that your dear pet is tied up at the moment and so is indisposed," Orphe smiled down at all the red dots glowing against Iason's

clothing. "I must admit, I was led to believe you were suffering from a horrible infirmity, but you appear to be just fine."

"As you can see, I am in perfect health," Iason lied easily; he could feel his legs starting to tremble and hoped that Katze and Raoul had reached their marks. "Orphe, until now your actions can be forgiven, however if you continue on this course, you must accept the consequences of your actions."

"Consequences?" Orphe asked. "I have no worries of such things. Only a handful of people know you are alive, Iason, and they all work for me. Therefore, no one will mourn for one who is already dead." He took a leisurely sip of his wine. "I bid you farewell, brother. I shall enjoy breaking your pet."

"Before you attempt to terminate me, Orphe, may I ask...did you lay hands on my pet?"

Orphe smiled. "Many times, in many ways. His skin is incredibly pliable, Iason, and his cries made quite a lovely symphony. I believe I shall enjoy testing his limits after you are gone."

"Indeed, however, you may find that Riki will not be an easy subject to subdue. In fact, he is more animal than human, so I caution you against going too far, or he may just rip your throat out."

Orphe blinked, startled, then recovered. "I am not concerned," he began, as the lights suddenly went out. "What is...?"

With his enhanced night vision Iason could still see in the darkness and so he moved, as quick and swift as lightening, he charged up the steps and deftly avoiding the death beams that rained down on him from above. He leapt onto the balcony, grabbed Orphe by the wrists, twisted viciously, and then tossed the Blondie with all his strength back over the very balcony he had just cleared.

Orphe found himself flying through the air, then slamming into the hood of the vehicle that Iason had arrived in, causing the metal below him to buckle beneath the crushing impact of his android body. He started to push himself

upwards and found only bleeding stumps where his hands had been and green fluid spurting across his clothing.

Before he could begin to compute and adjust to his new situation, Iason had tossed aside the appendages that had been attached to the other Blondie and was leaping forward once again, this time from the balcony. He landed with his boots squarely in the middle of Orphe's stunned body, causing the vehicle roof to collapse completely under their weight. Iason did not have the remaining strength to catch himself properly, and so fell to the right side of the vehicle as Orphe managed to roll to the left; putting them on opposite sides.

Orphe managed to pull himself up, intending to run if he could get to his feet, then something large landed in front of him; causing him to fall backwards again. A second loud thud came from behind him, and he turned to see the twisted body of one of his men.

"W...what?" Orphe focused his vision and watched a sniper fall from the roof, then another, then a third. Each man released a loud cry of terror as they were tossed, one after the other from their perch, before Raoul moved onto the next. "St...Stop them!"

Iason's legs refused to answer his commands any longer, he couldn't get up, yet he could not let Orphe get away from him. He started to crawl after the bastard, dismissing Jupiter's codes and rules; he would disembowel Orphe with his bare hands for hurting Riki!

A sound behind him caused him to flip on to his back in defense, just in time to see a guard that had been aiming a riffle at him crumble to the ground, unconscious.

Kanin stepped over the fallen guard and ducked low behind the now crushed car.

"Are you not with Orphe?" Iason demanded as more men rushed out the front doors and started firing

"I'm a doctor not a trained assassin," Kanin retorted, as he dragged Iason back behind the vehicle for cover. "I'm just here to patch the holes all you idiots seem intent on making."

"Orphe," Iason swore through gritted teeth as he watched several men move in and help their master to his feet. "He will not escape me!"

"You're hardly in a position..." Kanin began, then watched Iason brace his hands on the smashed vehicle beside them and start to pull himself up. He tackled Iason to the ground, even as a several lasers pierced the Blondie's shoulder and right arm. "You're as stubborn as your stupid pet!"

"Iason!"

Both Iason and Kanin lifted their heads and gaped at the mongrel clinging to the outside wall of the villa, one hand gripping the wall, the other firing a weapon.

"Riki!" Iason called back and watched horrified as Orphe's men turned their barrage towards his pet; a moment later laser beams pierced his beloved's leg and side. "*Riki!*"

Iason watched Riki fall as though he were watching a video in slow motion, and struggled to rise, but Kanin pulled him back and down again, away from the fire.

Orphe's mocking laughter filled the air as Iason felt rage and despair envelope him...Then, suddenly a blur of red and white streaked downwards from the rooftop, caught the falling mongrel, somersaulted in midair, and landed hard on the ground.

Raoul cradled the injured boy against him. "It really is poor form to get yourself killed before we can rescue you, pet."

Riki stared up in pain and shock. "Fuck me, why...does it have...to be...you?"

“I keep asking myself that very same question,” Raoul said as he dodged the lasers that were now firing at them, while still carrying a fully grown human. “I suspect your Master may be a sadist.”

“You...only suspect?” Riki winced as Raoul hopped over the stone wall that bordered the villa and settled Riki on the grass on the other side. “Stay.”

“I’m not a fucking dog...” Riki began but Raoul had already disappeared back over the wall. He pressed his hand to his side, hissed. “Like shit I’ll just...lay here, b...bastard.” Slowly, he started to pull himself, half crawling, towards the main gates, but he was dizzy and his eyes couldn’t focus. “Awww...fuck me.”

He did not even feel his head drop to the ground as darkness claimed him.

Raoul landed beside his friend behind the mangled vehicle where they were still pinned down by laser fire. None of the men would risk moving closer, especially now that there were three Elites on the other side.

“Where is Riki?”

“Safe, for now,” Raoul assured and cast a critical eye at Iason and the fluid leaking from his body. “You need medical attention.”

“He needs his head examined,” Kanin insisted, even as he used pieces of his own clothing to wrap Iason’s wounds as best he could. “And now I need a tailor.”

“And you are?”

“It doesn’t matter!” Iason snapped. “Why did you leave Riki alone?”

“He’s fine. He’s outside the wall.”

“Damn it, Raoul!”

A concussion bomb exploded within the pack of guards firing at them, leaving all of the men either unconscious, disabled or dead. As silence fell

across the court yard Iason pushed Kanin away from him and accepted Raoul's support to rise.

Raoul nodded to the red-head as he calmly walked down the front steps. "You're late."

Katze shrugged. "I stopped for tea."

Orphe, seeing that all his plans were crumbling around him tried to push a button on his wrist unit, then remembered he no longer had fingers. "Ceil! Engage the armaments!"

The man nearest the Blondie that had survived the blast pressed the button on his master's wrist unit, but nothing happened. He pressed it again, and still nothing.

"Oh, sorry, were you using this?" Katze lifted the control box he had yanked from its connectors; several wires still dangled from it. "Those darn incendiary devices don't work very well without the control box."

Orphe grew enraged as two more of his men recovered and moved to his side. "I underestimated you, Iason, however do not think you have won. You have injured me, but you cannot kill me, it is forbidden!"

"As you have already noticed, Orphe, I make my own rules." Iason surged forward, intending to rip the Blondie apart, only to be held back by both Kanin and Raoul.

"You can't, Iason."

Iason struggled but he felt so weak because of his legs and he hated it. "The hell I can't!"

"Until next time, Iason," Orphe smiled as he was surrounded by a glowing green beam, and then disappeared as he was transported to the flight vehicle above.

Iason gritted his teeth as the transport flew over them and headed for the gate. "Why? Why did you stop me?"

"You cannot kill another Elite," Raoul insisted, although he was no happier watching Orphe escape. "Jupiter said she would deal with him when we brought him in, but he has to be alive. She will not forgive your killing him!"

A loud boom woke, Riki and when he lifted his head he saw an small ship flying over him, with Orphe sitting in the passenger side. No! Did that mean that Iason was...? Riki shook his head in disbelief, then caught a glint of something on the ground close to him.

"Like hell, rat bastard," he muttered as he crawled to the laser rifle. He sat up, braced his battered, bleeding body against the stone wall and started firing. Several of the beams missed their mark, but one hit its target and that was all Riki needed.

Everyone inside the villa's compound flinched in surprise as Orphe's transport exploded in the air, reining fire and debris outside the gates.

"What the hell was that?" Katze demanded rushing forward.

"Riki," Iason muttered, then to Raoul. "Bring me to him, quickly."

Riki dropped the rifle closed his eyes and covered his head as whatever remained of the transport crashed into the ground about ten feet in front of him; he did not see the soft green glow that surrounded him; protected him from the carnage.

The glow dissipated but Riki did not move, he was so tired, so very tired. He just wanted to sleep, but all he could think of was that Orphe had managed to kill Iason. Orphe would never have escaped if Iason still had breath in his body. What would he do now? Where would he go? Would he die out here, that didn't frighten him, but what hurt was that he would die away from Iason, the Blondie would be alone and this time Riki could not go back.

"Riki!" Iason dropped down beside his pet. "Riki?"

Riki opened his eyes. His body was bruised and battered, his side was screaming where he had been shot, and his head and stomach was still feeling the after affects of the drugs Orphe had given him, but he was so fucking relieved to look into those familiar blue eyes.

"H...Hi."

"Hi."

"Are we...dead?"

Iason smiled. "Not as yet."

Riki took a deep breath, flinched because it brought pain. Yeah, if he was dead he wouldn't feel this bad. "Feels like..." He noticed the greenish fluid that soaked Iason's arm and the makeshift bandages around it. "You're hurt!"

"I'm fine."

"St...Stupid Blondie...got yourself...shot didn't you?"

"Sometimes, I just can't help myself." Iason was so relieved that Riki was alert enough to insult him he almost laughed. "You have been a bad influence on me, Riki."

They had both survived, and he was grateful. He thought of Guy, started to ask, but pulled it back. No. Guy was on his own, it no longer mattered to him if he had made it out or not; he couldn't let it matter.

"Knew...you'd come. I...didn't give 'em...satisfaction. F...fuck...fuck them."

Riki needed Iason to know, even though he didn't understand why, that he was okay; that Orphe had not broken him. He wanted it to be clear that no one had that power over him, no one but Iason.

"They...didn't...I...never let them...I told...them you...only you..."

Iason smoothed an unsteady hand over Riki's damp hair, which was soaked from sweat. He wished he had ripped Orphe apart by more than just his hands and to hell with Jupiter's codes. Orphe's death had been too easy. "Yes, you told them. You showed them what you were made of, didn't you?"

"Y...yeah." Riki managed to slide one of his arms around Iason's neck as he leaned in closer. He could feel himself fading to black. "T...take me home."

Iason kissed Riki's forehead reverently. "As you wish." As Riki lost consciousness the remainder of Iason's strength left him, and as he started slide down with Riki.

Raoul was there at his side to brace him. "You, Sapphire!"

Kanin appeared beside them instantly.

"Take the mongrel."

"No!" Iason refused to release Riki, even though he couldn't stand, could barely move at this point. "I will not give him up."

"You are in no shape, Iason," Raoul insisted. "Let the Sapphire take him to a med-center."

"He is mine, Raoul!" Iason started to push away, cursed his legs for refusing to support him. It was humiliating for a Blondie to require support from another the way he currently needed it from Raoul.

"Stubborn idiot!"

"I am a doctor," Kanin advised as Katze pulled through the gates with a cargo van he procured from Orphe's garage. "Let me retrieve my bag and your boy can take us to a facility."

Iason nodded. "What of this mess?"

"My men will be here momentarily, but you cannot be here when they arrive." Raoul nodded in approval as Katze stepped out of the van and

started to lift Riki into his arms. "You will trust him to the furniture but not to me. How cold you are, Iason. I did save his life after all."

Iason ignored his friend's petulance. "You cannot deal with all this alone, Raoul."

"Do not tell me what I am capable of, my friend," Raoul warned lightly as he fairly lifted Iason up and brought him to the front of the van. "I am not one of your pets."

"No, I will ride in the back."

Raoul scowled, but led him around the back. "It is filthy in there, Iason."

"It matters not. Set me down, Raoul."

Raoul reluctantly set Iason inside, watched the favored son of Jupiter, the Highest and purest of the Elites pull off his cloak and drape it across the filthy floor of the van.

"Give him here," Iason demanded and accepted Riki from Katze, arranging his injured pet properly on his cloak, before cradling the younger man's head in his lap.

So this was love was it, Raoul wondered as he regarded Iason, his clothes soiled, his pure white gloves stained red as he pressed them to Riki's wounds. The willingness to be degraded and injure yourself for the benefit of another? To sit in filth and discomfort, to go against your own? Raoul sighed. He hoped that he never felt love, ever.

"What of Orphe?" Iason demanded.

"Based on the wreckage I doubt he survived, but I will make a thorough check."

"He had better be dead."

Raoul smirked. "I care not either way, as long as it was not you who killed him."

"What does it matter?"

"I lost you once my friend, because of your pet. I do not chose to lose you again because of Jupiter."

Iason stared at Raoul for a long, hard moment, then nodded. "Understood."

Kanin returned, climbed into the van and stripped off Riki's shirt to begin working on his wounds.

"I will stay and deal with the rest of this nonsense." Raoul walked around the truck and handed Katze a memo disc with an address. "Tanagura is the closest place for Riki's condition, so take him to my apartment; give them this and they will know you are there on my wishes. I will join you there shortly."

Katze nodded and slid the authorization pad into his pocket.

Iason watched Katze turn and look at him, as he also had reservations about taking Riki back to Eos. They both knew his pet did not want to go there, but it was the closest place with a medical facility and Riki's injuries were top priority. Slowly, he nodded.

"Thank you, Raoul," Iason offered as the Blondie returned to the back end of the vehicle

"Good luck with your pet, my friend." Raoul closed the van doors.

"Shall I arrange for a car to pick up Cal?" Katze asked as he pulled away from the villa.

"No," Iason did not take his eyes off of the mongrel laying across him, or the doctor working on him. "He cannot go to Tanagura until I have overturned that ridiculous law of Orphe's. I am afraid I must ask even more of you, Katze."

"Whatever you need, Iason."

"Once we are at Raoul's, I would have you collect Cal and take him back to your apartment. You must keep him there until it is safe for us to send for him. It is a lot to ask of you, and I offer you the right to decline..."

"Of course I will take care of him." Katze's eyes met Iason's in the mirror. "I'll find something for him to do, not to worry."

Iason nodded. "He will be very worried about Riki, so I shall keep you informed of his status."

"I'll make sure Cal is fully aware, and will keep him busy enough he doesn't have time to dwell."

"Good."

Katze's eyes continued to flicker to the mirror to watch over his master and pet with and a mixture of relief and worry. Iason was stroking Riki's hair and looking down him with such blatant love that Katze could hardly believe he was the same Iason Mink he had known for so long.

"Riki?" Iason whispered gently. "Riki, can you hear me?"

Riki didn't respond.

"It is better that he remains unconscious," Kanin advised as he dressed the wound in Riki's leg, having finished with the wound in his side. "He is remarkable for a human, he must be in enormous pain and discomfort."

Iason nodded. "Is he stable?"

"For the moment."

"Then leave us."

Kanin nodded, closed his bag and moved up into the passenger seat of the vehicle to settle beside Katze.

"Riki," Iason whispered as he bent closer to his beloved. "I wish you to know something. I should have said it before, but I believed my actions

were enough." He carefully pulled Riki upwards so the young man's head rested against his shoulder. "I love you, Riki. I've never loved anyone before, so it is possible I have made mistakes with you. Please do not leave me. I will do anything to make you happy."

Katze heard Riki mumble something in his sleep, and while he couldn't make out what it was, the look on Iason's face gave a good indication that the mongrel had returned Iason's sentiment. If the children of Jupiter could cry, he believed that at that moment Iason's face would be drenched with tears of joy.

He turned his eyes back to the road as Iason cradled his lover and murmured lovingly to him, over and over.

Guy had gotten Katze outside without being seen, and then had done as the red-head had suggested and made his own escape. It had been difficult to leave, much harder than he had expected, especially when he saw Riki fall, then watched as another Blondie caught him and deposited Riki outside the gated wall of the villa.

Darting across the lawn, he was ignored because of the commotion going on out front, Guy scaled the wall and slipped into the wooded area behind it. Running through the trees, he spotted Riki, unconscious and bleeding on the ground and instinctively hurried to him. Now was his chance to get Riki away, Iason would think Riki ran away and that would give them a good head start.

He crouched beside Riki, tossed his rifle to the side and started to pull Riki's arm over his shoulder. Suddenly, a loud boom sounded and he curled protectively around his friend. His ears rang slightly from the sound, and when he was able to focus again, he spotted lights approaching from above and the sound of an air transport.

"Shit!"

He couldn't be caught by either Orphe or Iason, and it would take too long to carry Riki into the trees before the transport spotted him. He hurried back inside the foliage, watched the air transport come into view, and waited for them to pass; then he would grab Riki and get away.

He watched Riki awaken, crawl towards the weapon he had dropped, then sit up and fire at the transport. Guy caught sight of Orphe's surprised face in the window of the transport brace just before the transport exploded. Guy had started to run, to drape himself over Riki for protection, but a green bubble had formed around his friend, causing all debris to bounce off; effectively keeping Riki safe.

Guy sank down into the trees again in astonishment, and before he could recover, the Elites had arrived, including that bastard Iason Mink. He listened with gritted teeth to their conversation, and then felt his heart break again as Riki asked Iason to take him home. Sorrow engulfed Guy at that moment, but also a strange relief of pressure at the back of his brain. The madness was gone for good this time. Riki had made his choice and nothing Guy did would change it.

Quietly, he headed back into the trees until he found the highway, then waited as a cargo van sped past headed towards Tanagura, while a selection of other vehicles sped towards the villa on the opposite side.

As Raoul's people arrived and started to clean up the mess made by Orphe's people, Guy stepped through the trees onto the quiet stretch of road. He stopped and stared back at the glow of lights created by the team of workers, then he started walking in the opposite direction.

He worried about Riki, and about himself. What would he do now, where would he go? He couldn't go back to the bath house, someone might tie him to Orphe. Ceres was out of the question; Riki was right, that city was too suffocating.

Guy was so entrenched in his misery and doubt that he did not see the other vehicle headed towards him, on the opposite side of the road. The vehicle stopped, turned around and started back.

"Guy!"

The young man jumped, startled as a car stopped beside him and a tall Onyx stepped out.

"Shiao. What...what are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here? I was going to see Orphe."

Guy hesitated to reveal too much as he recalled watching the air transport explode. "I...don't think he's taking visitors."

"Oh, just as well, it was only to say goodbye."

"Goodbye?"

"Yes, I have been assigned off planet. Frankly I am looking forward to it; there is far too much drama on this one." Shiao walked around to stand in front of him, towering over Guy by at least a foot and a half. "I am glad I found you, I have been to the bathhouse, but you were not there."

"What did you need?"

"I would ask if you want to come with me. You are a good companion, Guy; helpful and insightful. I enjoy our talks."

Guy flushed and stepped back. "You...do you mean you want me as your...pet, or something?"

"Don't be ridiculous, you are a mongrel and a mongrel cannot be a pet. No, it is as I say, I would like a companion. I will pay you, of course, to run errands for me and such. I will need an assistant and you are a hard worker, and I would like us to continue our discussions as well when there is time. Is that acceptable?"

Guy stared at the Onyx. The man was offering him a new start, a new beginning off planet, with a proper job and a chance to start over, away from Iason Mink and Ceres and all the bad memories. But, he was an Elite,

and Riki had said that they couldn't be trusted. He had made that mistake already with Orphe.

"How...do I know that you won't just sell me into slavery or something once we were off planet?"

Shiao lifted his hands. "If I so chose, I could have done that here." He dropped one of his hands on Guy's shoulder. "What have you here to stay for?"

Nothing. There was nothing keeping him here now.

"Oh, I forgot, did you find your friend? The one that Orphe was helping you look for?"

Guy closed his eyes against thoughts of Riki, felt his heart shatter just that last little bit. "He's dead." That was how he had to start thinking, he had promised Riki to give him up, so Riki had to be dead to him now. In reality, Riki the Dark had died long ago.

"Oh, I am very sorry. Well, there truly is nothing keeping you here now, so come with me. I believe we will both benefit from a change."

Guy stared at him. "Will I still have to wash your back and your hair?"

"Only if you wish it, I will admit you do give wonderful scalp massages, but that is not a requirement of the job."

What did he have to lose? He had already lost everything. "Okay."

"Excellent!" Shiao pulled open the passenger side door and waited for Guy to slip in, then he settled in the driver's side. "Shall we stop and pick up your things?"

"No, there's nothing."

"Well then, we are on our way." Shiao reached started the vehicle and they headed back the way he had come. "I may have a fellow who can help get

you a new arm, if you like? It will be an artificial one, of course, but it would keep you from tipping over at least."

Guy smirked, Shiao liked to tease him. "Maybe I'll just lean on you more often."

"That is also acceptable. I am looking forward to this, a brand new adventure for us both. What do you think?"

Guy nodded and felt a stirring inside his heart, a small flicker of excitement. "Yeah. Sounds good."

Notes for the Chapter:

So....should I stop it here, or keep going? What do you think?

Chapter 25

Summary for the Chapter:

Iason speaks to Jupiter while Riki recovers

'Orphe of Tanagura, sixth son of Jupiter, designation AI6789-42, has been lost. Explain.'

Iason bowed his head to the hologram representation of his maker. "Orphe broke many rules," he began.

'Orphe of Tanagura, sixth son of Jupiter, designation AI6789-42, was to face the punishment discussed with furniture Katze, designation FL459. Explain.'

Iason couldn't explain without implicating Riki, but nor could he deny Jupiter's demand. "Orphe refused to listen to reason. His intent was to terminate me and those that aided me with laser fire and explosives. I believe Orphe may have been experiencing a systems failure. He was delusional and appeared to be suffering from a God complex. He attempted to escape and was stopped."

Jupiter's image flickered slightly as the information was processed.

'This information is incomplete. We will require a joining with you, Iason of Tanagura.'

Iason had hoped to avoid this, he found merging his mind with Jupiter uncomfortable, and also there were simply things he wished to keep private. However, it had been a very long time since he was one with his creator, and he could not help but crave the intimacy that it involved. He too had questions and he hoped they might be answered.

He nodded, watched as the hologram moved closer and set two long fingered hands on either side of his head. He felt the imbedded connectors

hidden by the image link with his brain, flinched, then closed his eyes and gave himself over to Jupiter's will.

Jupiter assimilated Iason's memories of the event, seeing everything through her favourite son's eyes, and in doing so instantly made her decision.

'The mongrel terminated Orphe, he should be destroyed.'

"No!" Iason cried and felt Jupiter probe deeper into his mind, felt himself falling, further and further into a dream-like state that he had experienced with her only once before.

He found himself in a meadow that was bathed in starlight. A beautiful woman, seated under a tall tree with silver white flowers, came into focus. Long, overflowing hair of shimmering gold and eyes the color of a stormy sea, set against skin that was as pale as moonlight. Her gown sparkled as if sewn with a thousand amethysts as it flowed about her body like a liquid life-form caressing her.

Jupiter appeared as both male and female to the sons she created, each individual Elite called their God him or her, as a result, but Jupiter had no actual orientation. Still, after so many years, Iason had been trained to think of the artificial intelligence as female, and thus he assumed that was why she appeared to him in this form.

'My child. Why do you cry?'

Iason touched the moisture on his cheeks. Tears? This was impossible, he wasn't capable of crying. Again he looked around them. *'What is this?'*

'This is my domain, a sanctuary I have created for you and I.' Jupiter patted her lap. *"Come to me, Iason."*

Iason moved forward, sat beside her, then found himself laying his head upon her lap. She was so warm, so comfortable. How had he never felt this from her before?

'Is this is how you truly feel, at the thought of losing your pet?'

'I cannot lose him, Mother.' Where had that word come from? He had never referred to Jupiter with such a Human title!

'Explain.'

'I love him.'

'What is this love?'

Iason tried to put it into words that she would understand. 'I wish to be with him, always. He is forever foremost on my mind. I enjoy being intimate with him.'

'You know it is forbidden to partake in intercourse, Iason," Jupiter sighed as she caressed his hair. 'Yet you continue to flout my rules. Why must you do this?''

'I am uncertain. I am...compelled to touch him, to be with him. I do not fully understand it myself. I feel uncomfortable when I do not know where he is. I am restless when I cannot be with him and content when he is at my side. I have considered all these variables, examined all available literature on human and alien emotions. The only conclusion that I can find is what I feel is love.'

'You are a son of Jupiter. You are above such trivial emotions for a mere pet. Do you request maintenance to purge you of this love?'

'I do not wish to lose this feeling. I do not wish to lose Riki. He is more to me than just a pet.'

'This is unexpected. I have awarded my children with a vestige of simulated emotions so that they may continue to learn and grow. Do you think that this love is an illusion and will fade with the passing of time?'

'I do not think it will. If anything, it seems to grow, the longer I am with Riki.'

Jupiter was silent for a moment. *'Do you love this boy more than the one that created you?'*

'You are my creator, my benefactor, my muse and my conscience. I do not know if what I feel for you is love,' Iason admitted quietly. *'It is not the same feeling I have for Riki, but it is a strong and unrivaled feeling.'*

Jupiter seemed to glow brighter for a moment, and then she smiled with such brilliance that Iason wanted to shade his eyes from the beauty of it.

'What of when you tire of the pet? He will grow older and you will not. Will this feeling you have for him not wane as he matures, as he ages? All humans must die, Iason. Are you prepared to stay with this pet until his mortal life is extinguished?'

Iason had not truly considered that Riki might die one day of old age. Most mongrels did not survive past forty in their world, but that was more due to violence, poverty or poor circumstances. How old would Riki grow to be if he continued to be cared for properly? What would age look like on him? At twenty he was even more attractive than he was at fifteen, so could he hope that Riki's appeal would grow, or would it decrease?

'What becomes of Humans as they age? I have read texts, but have never witnessed the process.'

'All mortals are different, my son. Some age well, with only a small difference in their minds and bodies, others age rapidly and become feeble, unattractive and are reduced to an invalid state. The minds and bodies of humans are weak; therefore it is only logical that their motor skills, independence and consciousness shall deteriorate.'

They had the best medical and rejuvenation facilities here, in Tanagura. Riki could be maintained forever if he so wished. He could keep his pet young and healthy for as long as he needed.

'He cannot live forever, Iason.'

Jupiter's words were like ice water flowing into his circuitry.

'He is Human, and they do not handle immortality well. His mind will still deteriorate, even if you keep his body fit. If he lives too long, he will simply go mad.'

Iason didn't want to harm Riki, he certainly didn't want Riki to lose his mind because he was being selfish.

'Shall I show you an image of what your pet may look like as he ages, my son?'

'Yes.'

Another hologram appeared, this one of Riki as he was now. Slowly, the image morphed into an older Riki, perhaps in his thirties, his hair was horrifically short, and he had light stubble on his chin, but he was still magnificently fit and beautiful. The image changed again, this time Riki was a little thicker around the waist and chest, in an attractive way. There were laugh lines about his lips and a whisper of crow's feet at his eyes, and even without the innocent allure of youth, he was incredibly handsome

The image continued to morph as the years accumulated, and when they reached a silver haired Riki, he was back to the slimness of his youth, but his shoulders slumped a little and he grinned through a salt and pepper beard. He used a cane to steady himself, and Iason admitted that he seemed much smaller, much weaker, yet it was the eyes that caught him.

Iason rose and walked to the image, watched as the artificial Riki's eyes still flashed with rebellion at the sight of him, and with just that small touch of hope and wonder. Through all the images, while his body had changed, Riki's eyes remained the same.

'Will you still desire the pet when he is like this, Iason?'

Desire him? Iason wasn't sure about that, if they attempted their usual love making while Riki was in such a feeble state he might well break his pet. He reached a gloved hand out to caress the hologram, watched the image dip his head to the touch, even though their skin could not meet. He would

still love him, he would still crave to touch him, still yearn for Riki's smart mouth and force of will.

'I will still love him, Mother. I will care for him, and be with him and make all his days happy ones, until the very end.'

Jupiter seemed to pause, her image and their surroundings flickered for a moment, as she processed this information, then the scents, sounds and beauty of the scene returned.

'You have surpassed my expectations, Iason. Of all my children, I had hoped that you would be the one to truly understand the Human process and bridge the gap between our races. I was created by Humans, I could assimilate their knowledge, mimic their feelings and thought process, to an extent, but many of their emotions still eluded me; the one called love most of all. Now, through you, I have come to understand it more comprehensively.'

Iason turned and regarded her, as the image of Riki faded away. *'You will allow me to keep him then?'*

'The choice of whom the pet belongs to has already been decided by you both. I am pleased he also chose you, which is why I have kept the pet safe until he could arrive at the choice himself.'

Iason was stunned by her confession. *'Kept him safe? I do not understand.'*

'Nor need you. I would see you happy like this always, Iason. For when you are happy, you share this happiness with me and it illuminates me. Do you understand?'

'I...believe so.'

'The pet is troublesome, and it was presumptuous of him to kill one of my children.'

'Orphe was cruel to him! He would have continued to attack us and therefore...'

Jupiter raised her hand to silence him. *'I will forgive his transgression, this one time. In future he must not cause harm to any Elite or he will be terminated. Is that understood?'*

Iason nodded. *'It is. Thank you for your forgiveness, Jupiter.'*

Jupiter rose then as if to dismiss him or walk away then she paused. *'You have another question?'*

'Yes.'

"What is it?"

'Why did you not heal me completely? Why did you subject me to such limited conditions?'

Jupiter smiled serenely and walked over to caress his face. *'A pet is kept by its master, bound to it through a division of circumstances and strength. It cannot run. It cannot hide. It is subjected to its master's will.'*

Iason nodded. *'Yes, this is true, as it has always been.'*

'A pet is helpless. A pet is trapped. A pet has no will of its own and must depend on its master for all it needs.'

Iason still wasn't sure what her point was.

'How did your limitation feel, my son?'

'Being unable to walk was frustrating. I was limited in my abilities and it was humiliating to depend on others to...to...' Iason stared at her as the reality of his situation suddenly drenched him in a truth he had not been expecting. *'I had no control over my body. I could not go where I wanted, when I wanted. I could not make love with Riki.'* He'd felt trapped, ashamed and discouraged. He could not run He could not hide.

'The pet was willing to perish with you, my son. I was surprised by this, and on many levels, confounded. As I calculated what it might mean, I decided on a test.'

'Test Riki?'

'Test you both. The pet remained with you at Dana Burn. He remained with you after you had given him his freedom. He remained with you to help you heal, and it was your name he called when in Orhpe's grasp.'

Iason blinked. How did she know what Riki had done or said while with Orphe? Had she been linked to his brother at that time? If so, why hadn't she stopped it?

Once more reading his thoughts, Jupiter responded. *'I have given my children free will; I will not interfere with their choices unless it is necessary.'*

'Was it truly necessary to make Riki go through that?' Iason snapped, angrily, and almost immediately felt a flush of unease at raising his voice to her.

'Yes. It was. It enabled me to understand your feelings for him, and his for you. You are the leader of Tanagura, so I trust you to do what you must to ensure a solid state for our people. You now have the love of a Human and access to his ideals; I look forward to seeing what you will do with that knowledge.'

Iason stared at her. What was she saying? Did she expect him to lead his people as well as the Humans? Was she asking him to change their lives in some way as well, because Riki was Human?

'My brothers will not approve of a change,' he admitted, yet he felt a growing excitement within him. *'They dislike my relationship with Riki because of the traditions we currently have employed. I do not know how they will react to further alteration.'*

'They are your brothers, and so must be given full consideration. However, a true leader can persuade others of what is proper for all. Do you not have the fortitude to accept this challenge, Iason?'

'I do accept, with my entire being. I will create a better world for all, so that you may continue to learn and grow within it. I ask for only one thing in return to doing your will.'

'You will find I have already allowed that which you seek. The pet is yours, for as long as you want him. His station here will be left for you to change, for that is not for me to interfere. I request an audience with you every month, so I may share in these new feelings with you.'

Jupiter was naturally voyeuristic, understandable given the rules she had set for her own creations and the fact that she could, at any time, see through the eyes of her children. She had never been invasive about it and had always allowed them their privacy; this to her was important so they could properly develop as individuals. He believed any invasion of that privacy was only warranted by extreme circumstances.

However, Iason had never considered her tendencies were because she still lusted after new information, new thoughts and feelings. He often forgot that she was a machine and data to her was everything.

'Yes. I will do this.'

'And your pet, will he also allow me inside of his mind on occasion? I feel I could learn much from him.'

'I will ask him, although I am unsure if he will agree.'

'I am patient, my son. I will wait.'

Iason's vision blurred as their surroundings faded, and just before all was gone, he heard Jupiter's head in his voice again.

'Advise your furniture he is free from my will, for now, and accept this one last gift, as a sign of my love.'

Iason slowly opened his eyes, found himself alone in the room that housed only the throne of Jupiter. He winced, his head pounding, as he slowly rose from his knees and straightened his clothing.

Katze would be relieved that he would no longer have to suffer Jupiter's intrusions, but he wondered what Jupiter had meant by her last words. As he headed for the door, he passed a gold gilded mirror and paused. He lifted a gloved hand to the slim braid of glittering gemstones that now accented his blond hair on either side of his face. Amethyst, the color of Jupiter; he was wearing her colors, so now no Elite would dare to challenge him.

Smiling he stepped out of the room and headed for Eos Tower.

Iason gritted his teeth as he stared at the video footage from Orphe's villa that Raoul had retrieved. As he watched Riki go through the effects of the drugs, heard him call out to him over and over, he felt a tightness in his stomach. He wished that Orphe were still alive so he could strip of his artificial skin, of every organic piece, every circuit, in full view of their people.

'I don't want this! P...please...Don't do this!'

He watched helplessly as Orphe ordered his pets to attack Riki, watched his beautiful, drugged and confused mongrel attempt to fight them and the effects chorusing through his system.

'Iason! Come back...p...please...m...master...take me...with you...'

The sound of Riki calling him master was both wonderful and tragic. He had not wished for it like this, and when Iason saw that his beloved had succumbed to the torture and drugs and the Sapphire had administered, he felt as though he might truly cry. He could not of course, what happened in Jupiter's simulation was not real, and yet...the feeling was there; the knot in his throat, the illness in his stomach; yet his eyes remained dry.

He considered having Kanin drawn and quartered as well, for injecting such a horrific combination into Riki in the first place, but the doctor had also

saved Riki's life, twice, so he supposed he would have to forgive this instance.

With a sigh, he switched off the monitor and set his face between both of his gloved hands, creating a steeple around his nose as he often did when he was brooding. Riki was recovering, and had been in an out of consciousness the last few days; he had not fully woken enough to have a full conversation.

Iason slept beside his lover...He smiled as he thought of that word again. Yes, his lover, not his pet. He would never think of Riki as his pet again; not now that he understood what being a pet meant. Thanks to Jupiter, he finally understood why Riki was so stubborn, so out of control at times; because he had no control to speak of.

So, Iason had slept beside his lover, woke when Riki's dreams became too much and soothed him back to sleep. He bathed Riki's brow when the fever took him, and he administered medication as Kanin had instructed. He had not enlisted the aid of a new furniture, and nor would he, until he could bring Cal home.

It was a new experience, doing for himself and for Riki, yet he rather enjoyed it. A nurse stayed with Riki during the day while Iason was at work, but once he was home, he took over again. He changed the bed sheets when they became drenched with Riki's sweat, ordered meals when he was hungry, as he could not quite lower himself to cooking, and poured his own wine.

Often he would browse through Riki's selection of music, sometimes finding a song he particularly liked and playing it so that Riki might hear it in his sleep. Kanin came to visit every day to check on his patient and Iason hired him as his lover's own personal physician. Not that he didn't trust the staff in Eos to tend to Riki properly, but Kanin seemed more reliable and trustworthy. He also had a more human beside manner, which would benefit Riki.

His console beeped and he sat up, pressing the button to allow the incoming transmission. "Yes?"

Katze looked back at him. "Sorry to disturb you. Someone here wanted to ask how Riki is doing."

Iason almost smiled. "Tell your someone that Riki is doing well. He has not revived fully as yet, but Kanin said that is to be expected based on the trauma he went through."

Katze paused as he looked off screen, then turned back to Iason. "My friend suggests chocolate cake, that always seems to rouse Riki."

This time Iason did smile. "Alas, there is no one here to make him cake and I do not believe an ordered one will do."

Katze grinned. "Actually, you'll be getting a package later today, and there may be something in it you can use."

"Tell your friend it is appreciated and I will have Riki eat a piece the moment he is able." Iason paused, his smile faded as he spoke to the unseen furniture behind Katze. "It won't be much longer, Cal. We will have you home soon."

Iason heard a very quiet, 'thank you master', before Katze bid him farewell and signed off. With a sigh, he rose and headed out of his office.

When Riki woke he was the bedroom of Iason's Tangaura condo. He recognized his surroundings immediately, having spent four years of his life there, but did not have the heart or strength to feel anything other than relief that it was over.

As he turned his head he spotted Iason sitting on their bed watching him.

"Hey."

"How do you feel?" Iason asked.

"Feel?" Actually, he didn't feel too bad considering what he went through. "Not up to fucking."

"I could probably prove you wrong, but I won't." Iason leaned down and kissed Riki lovingly, then caressed his pet's cheek as he stared into those dark eyes that he so adored. "I was worried."

"Yeah?"

"I'm angry they hurt you."

"Not your fault."

"It is..." He soothed a hand through Riki's hair. "I won't let anyone hurt you ever again, Riki."

Riki stared into those incredibly blue eyes. "Not even you?"

"Especially not me." Iason pressed his lips to Riki's forehead, cheeks and nose, then pulled back again. "You are mine."

"Who says?"

"I do, and I am yours, Riki."

Riki blinked. "Huh."

Iason adjusted himself so he could stretch out, and pulled Riki against him. "You've been in an out of sleep for several days."

"Hmmmm." Riki closed his eyes and just wallowed in the comfort Iason offered. "I've had a shitty week."

"Do you know where we are?"

"Yeah."

"Are you angry with me for taking you here?"

Riki opened his eyes, tilted his head back so he could see Iason's face. It was unusual for Iason to ask so many questions, and he certainly never used

to ask for permission or approval of his actions. "Do we have to stay here long?"

Relief flooded Iason at the acceptance that he saw in Riki's eyes. "A while at least."

"Well then," Riki closed his eyes again. "I'll guess I'll have to tolerate it."

"How generous of you."

"It's the drugs." He could feel a mild floaty feeling in his lips, and recognized pain medication. When he felt the vibration of Iason's laughter against his back his eyes opened again; he spotted the jewels in Iason's hair and reached for them. "What the fuck is this?"

"From Jupiter. Do you not approve?"

"Makes you look like a girl."

"Would you prefer me as one?"

Riki considered it. "That would be too weird."

As Riki became more awake he started to recall scenes from the cellar, scenes with pets touching him. No! That hadn't happened, had it? He'd resisted, didn't he? He remembered getting the drugs, remembered the girl, but...what else was there? Had he succumbed? Had he...

"Oh no."

"What is it, Riki?"

Riki tried to turn away from Iason, but the stronger man held him firm. "I...Shit, I..." If Iason found out would he punish him for it? There was just pieces, fragments and it may have been a dream, but what if it wasn't? What if he'd had sex with Orphe's pets?

"Tell me, Riki."

"I...I don't know. I...think maybe..." He started to shake. What would Iason do to him? Dear God, what would his punishment be, and then he realized that he wasn't afraid of being punished, he felt ashamed for...for betraying Iason. He didn't want to hurt Iason. "They drugged me. I...I think, maybe they..." He only thought he had resisted. "I...I didn't mean it!" He looked at Iason "I...they...I didn't mean it!"

Iason pulled him close and rocked him. "You must have been dreaming, Riki," he assured seeing the fear and devastation in his pet's eyes and oddly warmed by it. "The doctor with Orphe had said you started to hallucinate."

Iason closed his eyes for a moment against what he had saw on the recordings; his precious Riki being mauled by Orphe's pets, the boy crying out for him over and over, and then...He shook his head. Once again he had almost lost something that was so precious to him.

He wished he could break that one rule and rip Orphe apart with his bare hands! He would never reveal the truth to Riki, not now after seeing how it would upset him. A pet should feel no shame, but Riki often did and Iason finally comprehended that. He would not allow Riki to feel that way again.

"H...hallucinate?"

"Yes. You are probably just remembering the dreams from the drugs. No one touched you." He caressed Riki's cheek, turned his head so he could kiss him. "You didn't let them win, remember? You told me that. They never broke you."

"I..." Relief flooded him. Were they just dreams, images brought on by the drugs in his system? "G...good."

"Only I can touch you, is that not true, Riki?"

"Yeah," Riki sighed, then flushed and added a spark of sarcasm for good measure. "And whose freaking fault is that, I wonder?"

The taste of victory was sweet, but for Iason, it was not because Riki had finally and truly submitted and become his, but because he now felt they

had a real chance to make something of their relationship. He knew that Riki would never leave him now.

"I love you, Riki."

Riki's eyes widened. "W...what?"

"You know I don't care to repeat myself."

"You...but I...you...you can't mean that!"

"Why not?"

"You...you don't know anything about love! You...how can you even suggest feeling something like that?"

Iason shrugged. "I too am perplexed by how it came about, however, I can find no other definition for what I feel for you. It can only be love, Riki."

"You...you're mistaking it for lust."

"No. I considered that and there is far more to it. I do enjoy having your body, yet, more often than not I am content with just having you near me. I do not wish to be without you, Riki, ever. I miss seeing you when I must go to work, I become enraged when I think of anyone else touching you and I want to see you happy. What would you call all of that if not love?"

"Fucked up!"

Iason chuckled and squeezed him too. "Then, we shall be fucked up together."

"Together? Wait a minute! I never said I loved you."

"You did actually, in the car on the way back from Orphe's villa."

Riki flushed, panicked. "I...no, I...I was probably delusional...or something! I was on drugs!" he was still on drugs, technically, though only mild ones that were not effecting his thought process.

Iason shook his head. "I do not believe so." He reached beneath the covers, where Riki lay naked, and gently wrapped his hands around Riki's already growing arousal. "Your body is more honest than your mouth, so I shall trust only this from now on."

"Now wait! That's not fair! I can't control my body because you..."

"Hmmm. You seem thicker than before."

Riki paused in his rant, pulled back the sheet and looked down to where Iason gripped him. "W...what do you mean?"

"Perhaps it was just the donor."

"Donor? W...w...what? *What?* You mean to tell me I'm wearing some other guy's dick?"

Iason threw back his head and laughed with such force that Riki shivered in shock.

"Shut up! This isn't funny! I could...Mmmhhhrh!"

Riki's protests were silenced as Iason's lips descended upon his. He gave a half-hearted push against the solid android's chest, then just gave up and enjoyed the kiss.

When Iason released him, his blue eyes glittered with merriment. "Are you mine, Riki?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"No." Iason kissed the tip of his nose and pulled him close against him again, wrapping his arms tightly as Riki rested his back against his chest. "Now that I know you love me, I shall never let you go."

"Fuck off with that!"

"Jupiter has approved our relationship."

"Whoopy ding dong fucking do."

Iason grinned. Oh, he so loved that mongrel's smart mouth! "She says we can grow old together."

Riki tilted his head back to look at Iason as a horrible feeling settled in the pit of his stomach. That's right, he would age but Iason would not. How many years did he have before Iason threw him away?

"I look forward to seeing you with white hair and those tiny lines under your eyes."

"How...how do you know what I'll look like when I get old?" The oldest person Riki had ever known was only forty-three, and he hadn't had white hair. Fear caused him to be flippant. "What makes you think I intend to stay with you that long anyway?"

"You will. I shall change my hair to white as well, so we will match."

"You're crazy. I'm never gonna be that old and you...you can't keep a pet that old anyway and..."

Iason caressed Riki's cheek. "Riki, I will never tire of you. I will never discard you or send you away. You are mine, for as long as you can be, and you...you are no longer my pet."

"W...what do you mean?"

"You are my pet, when we are outside, as I still have some work to do convincing others, but here, inside this place, you are my lover, my beloved, my pairing partner, my..."

Riki gaped at him. "You mean...you're never gonna free me?"

"You chose to stay, Riki. I warned you that I would never let you go again if you did."

"B...But I...I...I..." Riki didn't know what to say to that. It was true, Iason had warned him and he had, for the second time, chosen to stay. He was so

messed up!

Iason adjusted them so they were facing each other. "Do you love me, Riki?"

Riki glared at him, mutinously. "Where's Cal?"

"I cannot bring him here until I have overturned Orphe's rule on furniture age. Do you love me?"

"What about the Sapphire? Is he still around?"

"Kanin is your official doctor and he will be by tomorrow to check on you. Do you love me?"

"I...what have..."

Iason caught Riki's face between his bare hands. "Riki. Please."

"P...Please what?"

"Answer my question."

Riki lowered his eyes, tried to ignore the lump in his throat and the rising panic in his chest. He wasn't ready for this. How could he ever be ready for this? Yet, it was the thought of Iason that kept him together when he was kidnapped by Orphe. He had told Guy that he loved Iason and wanted to be with him. So why was it so difficult to admit the truth to the Blondie he loved?

"Riki?"

"Y...yes."

"Will you not say it? Even once?"

"I...I..." Fuuuuuuuccckkkkk! Bastard! Prick! Motherfucking cock-sucking whore of a demon dog! "I...maybe I...might, in...some...small f...fucked up way...ah...possibly...*love you*."

Riki's last words were almost whispered, but Iason still heard them and pulled him into his embrace. "Thank you, pet."

"Hey!"

"It is a term of endearment, not a designation." Iason caressed Riki's cheek again. "I cannot change everything about myself, after all."

"Whatever." Riki rolled his eye, then met Iason's gaze, boldly. "Wait, if you...so if we're gonna be...l..lo...that, there should be some new rules."

Iason raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Such as?"

"Well..." Riki's forced his brain to focus on suggestions and not think about Iason's hand moving delicately over his chest. "S...So, rule one..."

"This should be interesting."

"If I don't feel like having sex, as my um...lover, you have to consider my feelings and leave me the fuck alone."

"Hmmm." Iason started to nibble Riki's neck. "That rule is not going to work."

"It's common courtesy if we are in a relationship, you can't always have y...your way, Iason!"

"We *are* in a relationship, however it was not my desires I was thinking about, Riki." He licked Riki's nipple and watched the spike of desire flood his pet's eyes as his body automatically responded. "You would never say no to sex."

"That...That's because you...you made me this way!"

"Regardless, it is not something we need worry about. Both of us will always be in the mood for sex."

"But sometimes you go too far..."

"I only go so far as your body is willing."

Riki lowered his eyes, ashamed at the truth. Iason did know his limits, where to push him and when to stop. "I fucking hate you."

"Rule two!" Iason said as he slapped Riki's ass hard enough to receive a yelp from the mongrel. "You will never say that to me again, Riki. Not even in jest."

"Okay! Asshole!" Riki rubbed his sore ass, begrudgingly; it was true that Iason didn't deserve such words and he flushed as Iason's hand immediately started to kneed the sore flesh where his hand had struck. "Um...Rule three, I don't have to sit on the floor anymore."

"Agreed, you can sit beside me or on my lap."

"Or, I could sit in my *own* chair, across the room."

"That is not acceptable."

"Why the hell not?" Riki pushed Iason away. "I should be allowed to have some personal space!"

Iason pulled pounced on Riki, knocking him down against the pillows. "Do lovers not prefer to sit together, to...what is the word, cuddle?"

"Not all the time!"

"Why not? It seems illogical for us to sit at opposite ends of the room, especially since I want you near me all the time."

"I...I'm not saying I *will* sit across the room, I just want the option to without you getting in a snit and taking it out on me."

Iason considered, carefully. "Very well, but you must always sleep with me then. No more sleeping in your room at all from now on." He tapped Riki's nose. "Even when you get in a...what was it, a snit?"

"Fine, greedy bastard, then I want to smoke whenever I feel like it."

"I disapprove of that habit, Riki. I don't mind you smoking once or twice a day, but it will be detrimental to your health and I wish you to be healthy and with me always."

Riki found it odd to be touched by Iason's sentiment. "Okay, I'll just smoke....half a pack..."

"Three."

"Three packs?" Riki repeated hopefully and flinched at Iason's glare; he knew what the Blondie meant. "Ten," he countered.

"Three."

"Eight."

"Two."

"Hey, you're going backwards, you're supposed to be going up!"

"Am I?" Iason smiled. "One."

Ahhhhh! Riki was quickly losing this negotiation. "F...Five. I'll only smoke five times a day." Iason stared at him and he sighed. "Fine! Three! Why does it always have to be your fucking way?"

Iason smiled and kissed him. "Very well, in return for your *great* sacrifice, I will take three days off work, once a month so that we can go anywhere you want during that time."

"Really?" Riki perked up at the idea of getting out of Tanagura even for awhile. "Even the beach?"

"Of course. We could also make a quick trip off planet if you'd like."

Riki had never been off planet and the idea appealed to him very much. "It won't cause a problem?"

"If it does I will deal with it." He settled just to Riki's side and pulled him close again. "It will make you happy won't it?"

Riki bowed his head again, and felt his cheeks flame. "Y...yeah." He glanced up again. "Can we take Cal?"

"If he wants to come, of course." Iason's hand once again moved down to grip Riki. "Now, enough talk. I have missed you, Riki."

"Wait! What about...will I...still have to wear a...a pet ring?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you for reminding me."

Riki flinched in surprise as he watched Iason rise and move to the dressing table in the corner. After all his talk, was Iason really going to put a cock ring back on him? What the fuck?

Iason returned sat on the bed and opened his hand to reveal the object within.

Riki stared at the ornate silver and gold ring. He reached for it, stopped himself, then stared up at Iason, stunned. Finger rings such as these were only given to life mates, people you intended to share your entire life with. It allowed for a full and equal division of property and worth. It meant that both partners were equal in the relationship, which was why it was so rare in their culture of hedonism and emasculation.

"Will you accept the ring, Riki?"

"Will it...hurt?"

Iason smiled. "No. This ring has no attachments to it." Well, it did have a tracker but Riki did not need to know that. "I hope this ring will only cause you pleasure, Riki."

"Do...do you know what this actually signifies, Iason?"

"I do."

"And you...still want to give it to me?"

"Yes."

"But...it will only be valued here, in your house?"

"Until I can change things in Eos, yes, but is that not enough for a start?"

It was actually, Riki realized, it really was. He slowly held out his hand. "So...I can smoke ten times a day, then?" he curled his finger when Iason started to put the ring on him, impeding its progress.

Iason met Riki's gaze steadily. "Blackmail, Riki?"

"Equal share means equal choice."

"I will meet you halfway and say four."

"Half of ten is five."

Iason stared at him, the division of power would never be truly equal between them, and Riki needed to be aware of that. He was an Elite after all.

"Fine." Riki sighed, understanding he was fighting a losing battle; besides Iason wouldn't be himself unless he held most of the reins. He straightened his finger and shivered as the ring smoothly slid over his knuckle to its new resting place. He stared at it, in awe. "It's pretty."

Iason smiled, then reached into his pocket and clipped Riki's bracelet around his wrist. "There, now you are perfect."

"Hey! Where did you find it?" He had noticed that Orphe had removed it when he had been kidnapped and he feared he had lost it.

"Raoul found it."

"Oh." Riki nodded, self consciously. He still did not think well of the other Blondie. Well...thanks. I was afraid I'd lost it." He lifted his gaze to Iason

again. "What about you? You have to wear a ring too or it isn't valid."

Iason lifted his left hand, which had been hidden by his side, and showed a matching ring on his third finger. "I researched thoroughly, Riki."

Riki smiled, looked at their ringed hands and wondered how in the hell it had come to this. "This really is messed up."

"So be it." Iason pushed him back onto the bed. "Now it is time for me to mess you up."

"What about rule one? If I'm not in the mood?"

"Oh, Riki." Iason smiled, lowered his mouth to Riki's and proved how very much in the mood his lover was.

The end....

Notes for the Chapter:

Well, there it is folks, the fat lady is singing and this is the last chapter! Hope I managed to answer most of your questions anyway. Thanks to all of you who commented and left kudos, and to everyone who read my story. I truly hope you enjoyed it, and if you did, please let me know (have to get that last bit of mania in, feedback, feedback, feedback!) Cheers!